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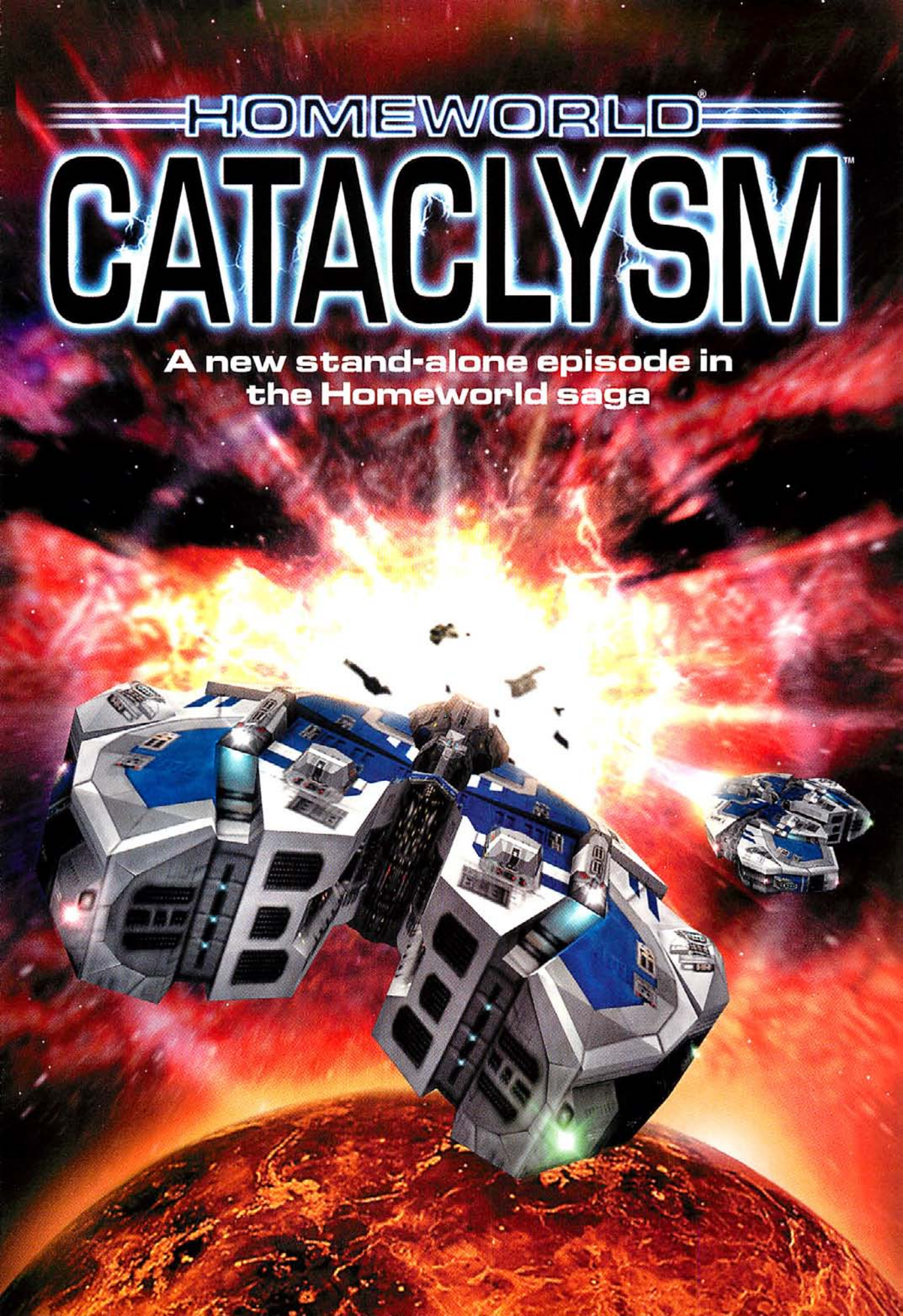
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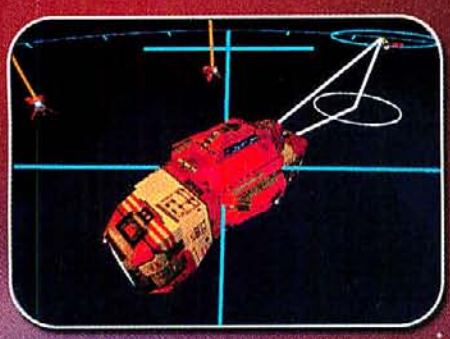
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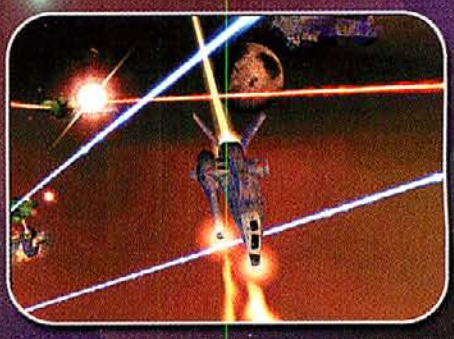
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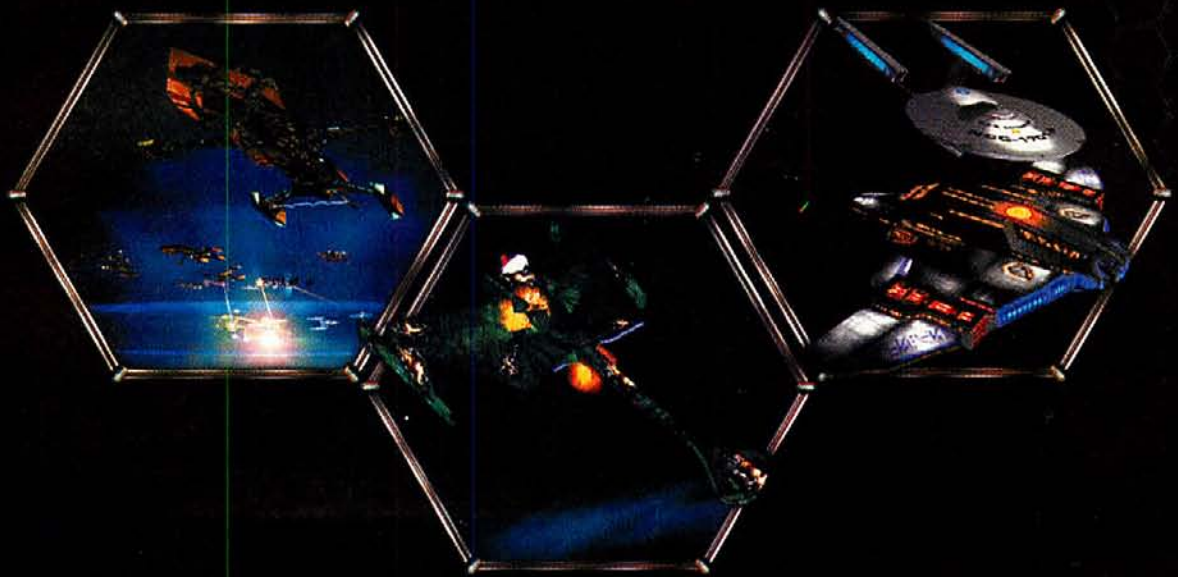
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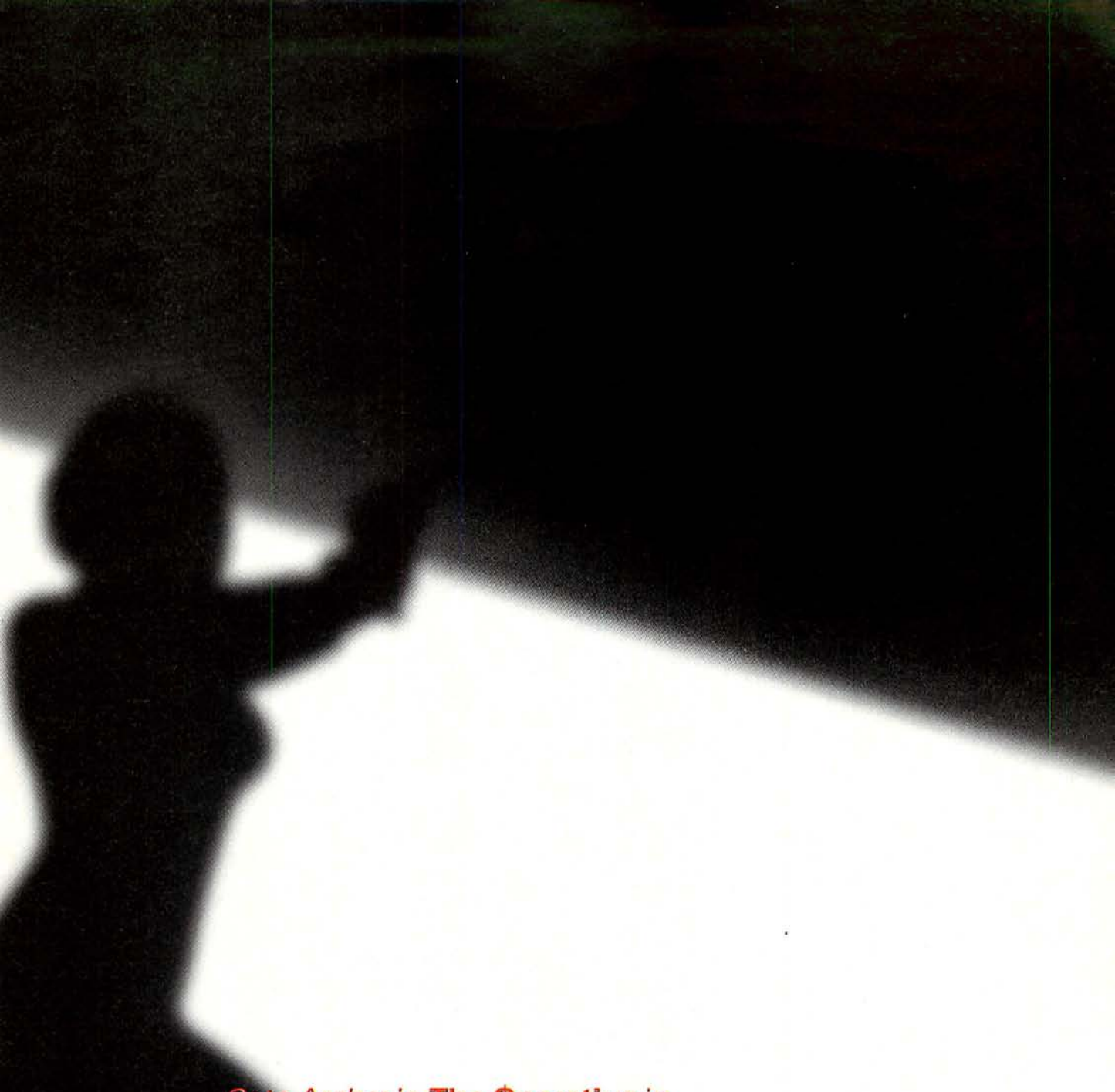
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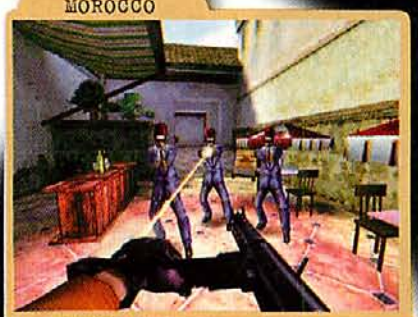


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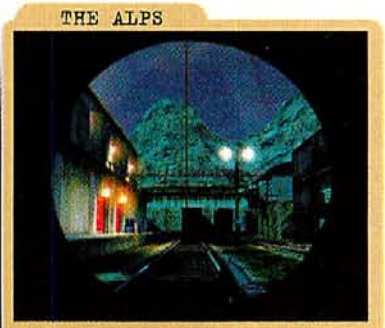
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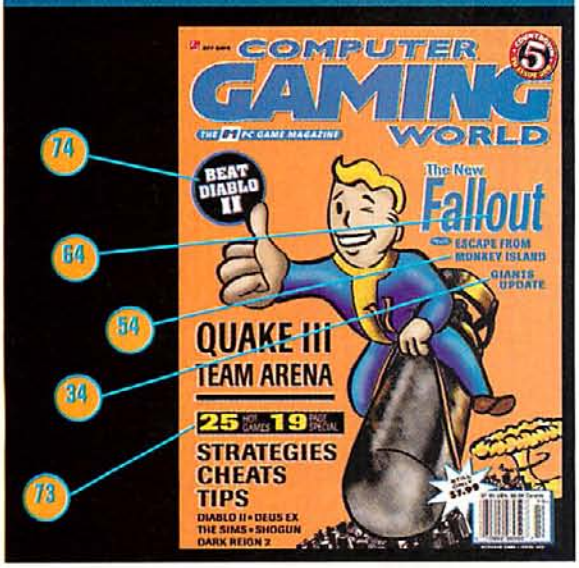
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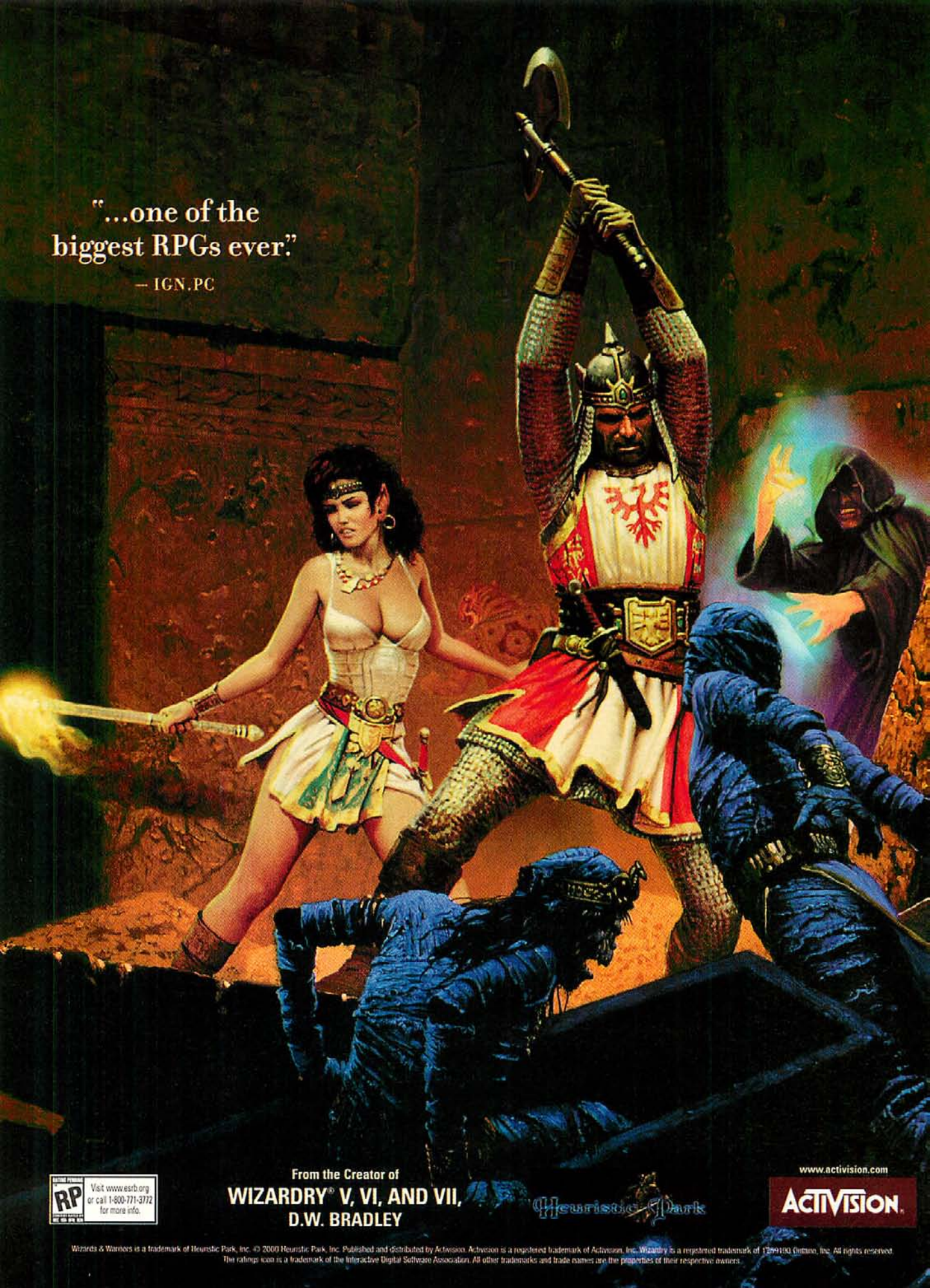
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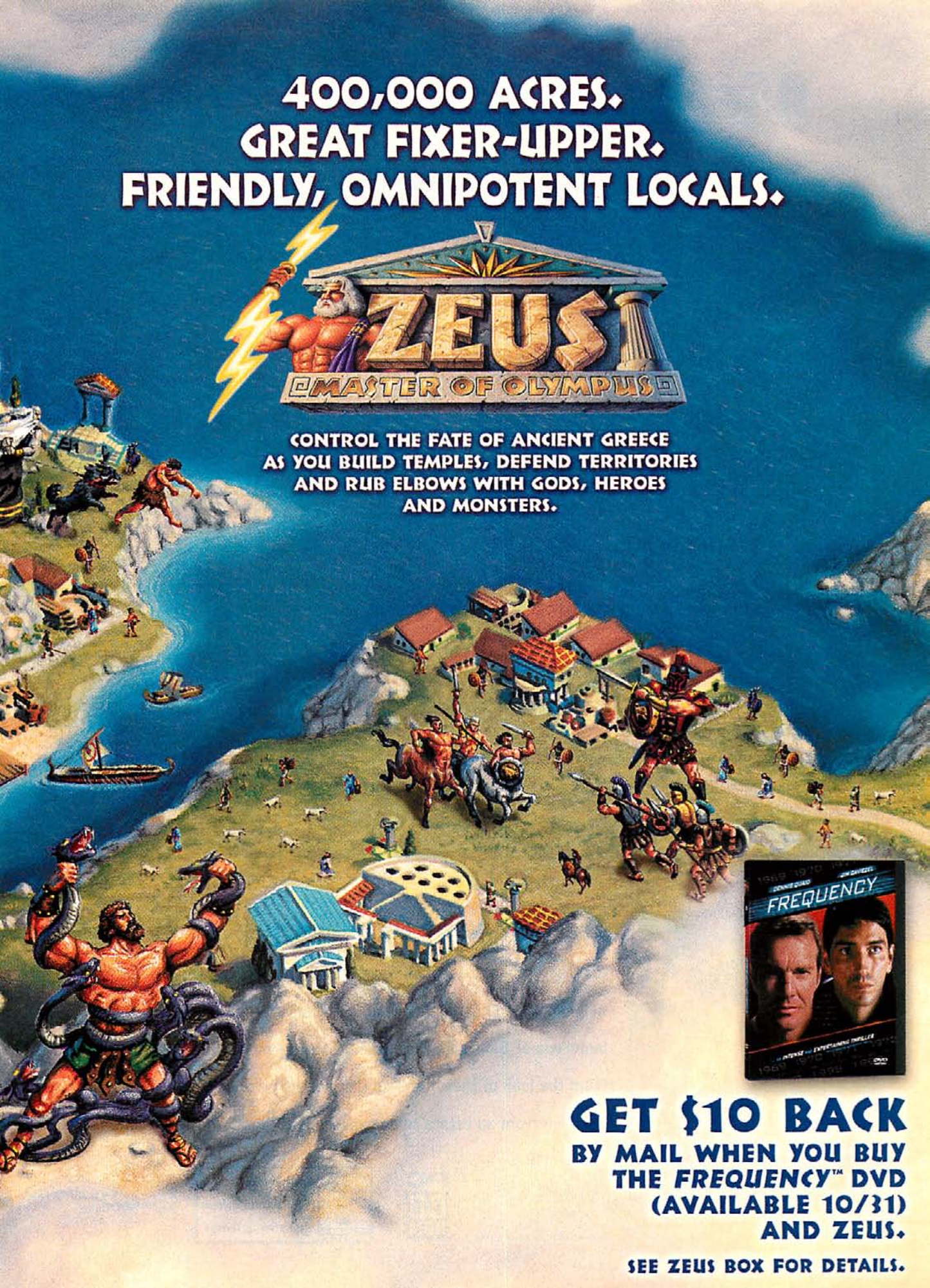
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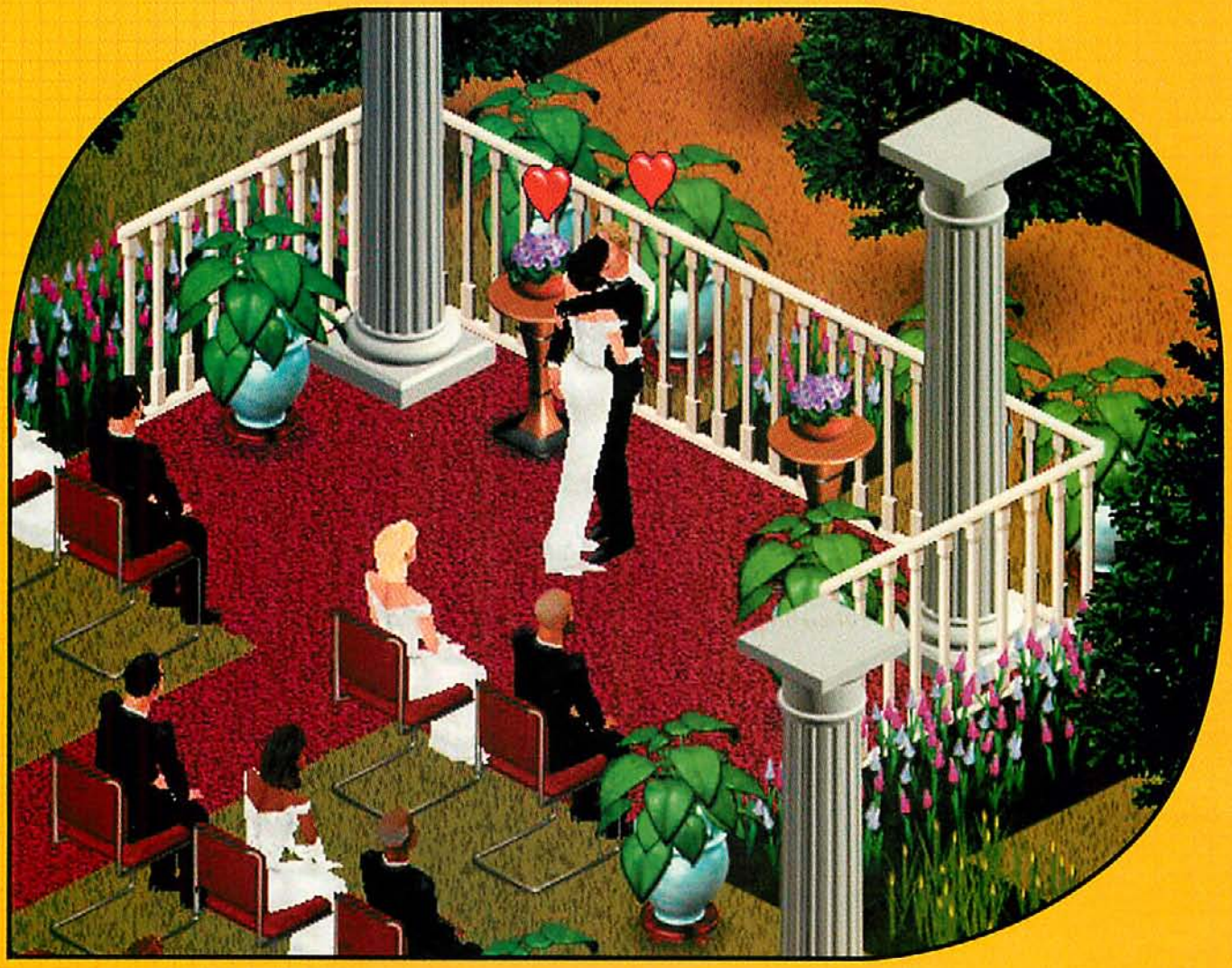
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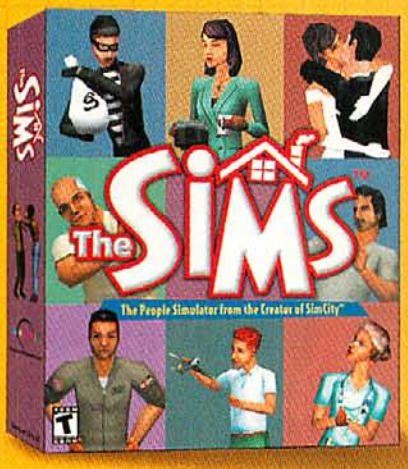
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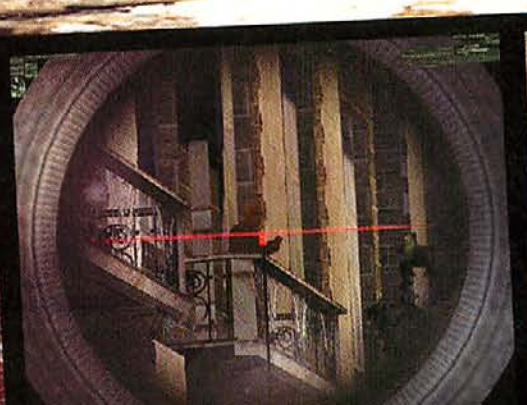
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LEE UNIACKE • lee_uniacke@ziffdavis.com

EDITORIAL DEPARTMENT
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
GEORGE JONES • george_jones@ziffdavis.com
EDITOR
KEN BROWN • ken_brown@ziffdavis.com
MANAGING EDITOR
CHRIS LOMBARDI • chris_lombardi@ziffdavis.com
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ASSISTANT EDITORS
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TOM PRICE (SPORTS) • tom_price@ziffdavis.com
COPY EDITOR
HOLLY FLEMING • holly_fleming@ziffdavis.com
CONTRIBUTING EDITORS
CHARLES ARDAI, MARK ASHER, GORDON BERG

ART DEPARTMENT
ART DIRECTOR
STEVE WANCZYK • steve_wanczyk@ziffdavis.com
GRAPHIC ARTIST
JASON BABLER • jason_babler@ziffdavis.com

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RUSSELL SIPE

The Tale of Icarus

Amidst all the clamor about the fate of the PC gaming industry in the face of competition from PlayStation 2 and the Xbox, an important fact has been overlooked: We haven't even seen the big Fall releases yet, and it's already been a banner year for PC gaming in terms of quality. The PC games market isn't going to swallow Sony's PlayStation 2 whole—or even touch it at all—but it is kicking ass and taking names where it counts the most—gameplay.



I bring this up for two reasons. First, we usually present our big giant strategy guide at the beginning of the year. That's the time when all the big titles come out, so it's always made the most sense to do this feature in the January or February issue. This year, though, things are a little different. Check out page 73 for our strategy guide to the best dozen games released this summer.

Second—and most importantly—the number of good games available for the PC makes me wonder what exactly is going to happen when the PlayStation 2 comes out next month. Clearly, it's going to be initially successful. With all the clout the original PlayStation had, how can it not be?

The PC games market is kicking ass and taking names where it counts the most—gameplay.

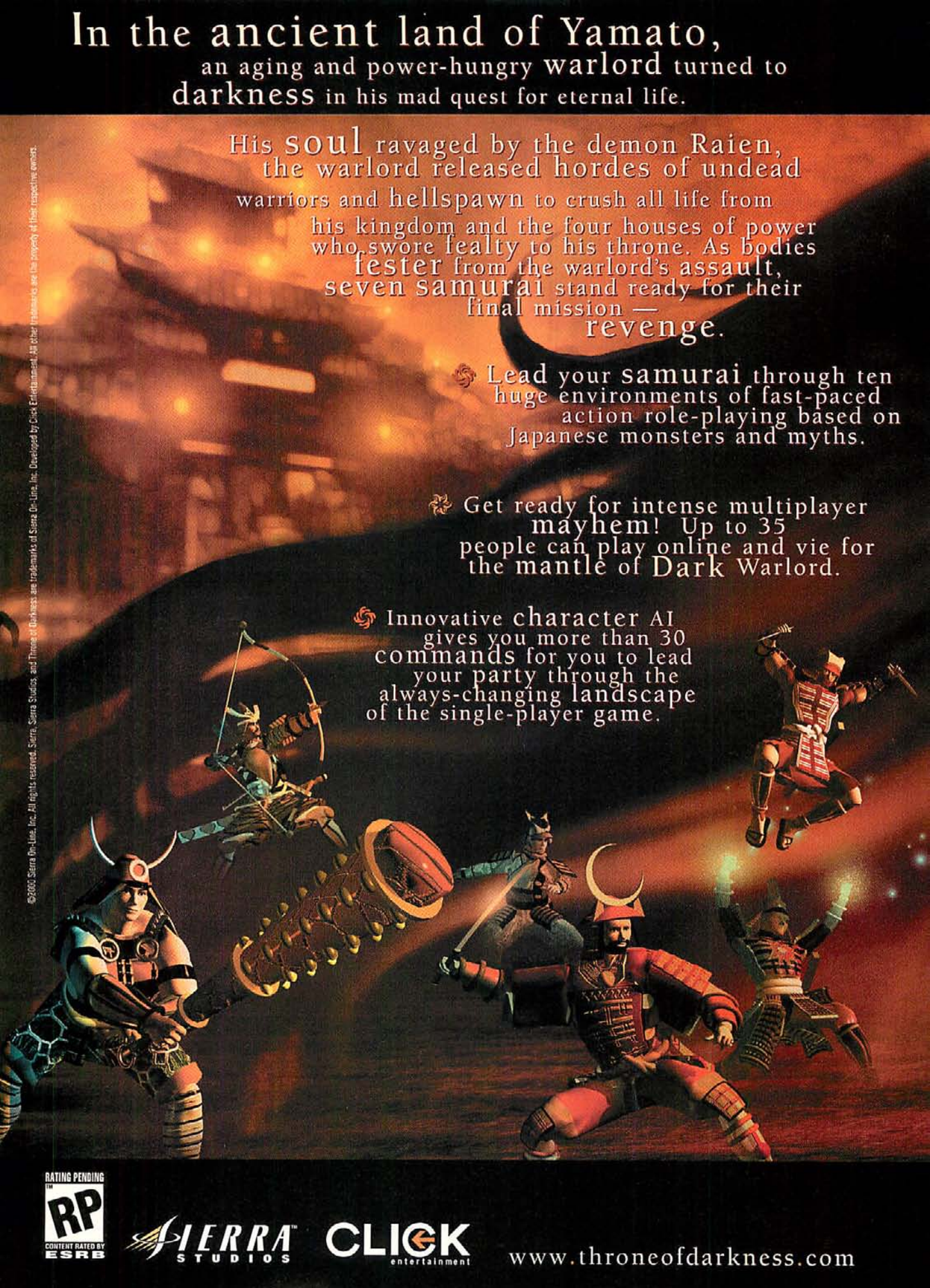
But with the exception of impressive sports titles like EA's MADDEN 2001, I didn't see a whole lot of innovation on the new platform at this year's Electronic Entertainment Expo. That has me concerned. Is Sony, in pursuit of the mainstream masses, missing the mark with a launch catalog of rehashed games? Maybe I'm just jaded. Or maybe they were showing all the amazing games behind closed doors.

I wonder, because only three or four years ago, PC game makers were clamoring about gaming becoming mainstream, about games becoming the dominant form of entertainment. And then we proceeded to get washed out with a slew of redundant, unoriginal games—real-time strategy and first-person shooter clones.

By December, of course, we'll know for sure. But be careful, Sony. Undoubtedly, the PlayStation 2 will sell millions of units at the start. But quality games—not DVD access or eliminating the need for a personal computer—are going to be what takes you to the top.

P.S. Online gaming is picking up a full head of steam, with several new massively-multiplayer gaming projects launched every month. To keep us all abreast of these developments, we've enlisted hardened gaming vet Thomas L. McDonald to edit the new Massively Multiplayer section of Inside Gaming. Check it out on page 152.

George Jones


In the ancient land of Yamato,
an aging and power-hungry warlord turned to
darkness in his mad quest for eternal life.
His soul ravaged by the demon Raien,
the warlord released hordes of undead
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his kingdom and the four houses of power
who swore fealty to his throne. As bodies
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LETTERS

Reviewing The Reviewers

I am curious if gaming companies care what you rate their games. You give a very fair and descriptive review of the games, and, for the most part, my choice on buying a game depends on whether you think it blows cheese or rocks the house. Do the big-time companies actually read what you guys have to say? If not, then they need to get off their asses and read a little bit.

Damian Knecht

Boy do they. We catch hell sometimes for our reviews, and it's safe to say that every major publisher has been infuriated with us at least once. But we don't play favorites; we strive to be fair, honest, and accurate; and we rate everything in a staff meeting to ensure no one editor's biases color the rating. Of course, not everyone agrees with us...

Vampire Review: The Condemnation

Brett Todd's review of VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE is a step in the wrong direction. The point is not whether the review is negative or positive – the point is it contains zero information, unlike Robert Coffey's great SOLDIER OF FORTUNE analysis (#191). What you printed is an opinion piece written with frat-boy derision and self-serving expletives, better suited to the back pages. Todd despises the setting, hates the game and proceeds to rip it to shreds. I expect this from teenager-run Web pages, not from Ziff Davis.

Do us and game designers a favor: give Brett Todd a back page where he can rant and let's see more of Bruce Geryk's incisive, fact-based writing.

Vincent Langlois

Brett Todd's review was unduly harsh. Every once in a while a game will come out that gives a breath of fresh air to the genre. VAMPIRE is one such game. Although I was very frustrated with the lack of a "pause" feature, save game anywhere feature, long dialog and often choppy performance, I found a way to work around each of those and still enjoy the exceptional qualities of the game.

The true virtues of the game are its beautiful imagery, great programming, and exceptional audio. I went through the entire game and really enjoyed being able to use disciplines for different things. This variation from the common RPG hack-and-slash – "a fighter is a fighter/a mage is a mage" – really makes the game intriguing.

I think a game with all these virtues deserves at least three stars, and possibly as much as four stars after installing the patch.

R. Shawn Davis

You make some good points. Keep in mind that while the patch may have improved many of the game's features, it is our policy to review games as originally released.

I just read John Talcott's letter in issue 194, and he seriously needs to lay off the crack! No story in VAMPIRE?! What? I'd like to know what version he has, because the one I'm playing has a tremendous engrossing story, excellent voice acting, and great cut-scenes.

I hate it when people badmouth good games – it is just their opinion.

R.C. "FangsFirst" Killian

What Would Blizzard Do?

That's simple: They would take their time, work carefully, and then release a buggy game after three years of development, with outdated graphics, uninspiring early levels and a "let's go beyond crap" saving system!

Sound familiar? Well, it is exactly the same thing Ion Storm has done, except for the "bitch" part. And I am not the only DIABLO II player to think so.

It's appalling to see how many reviews of DIABLO II fail to address the ridiculous saving feature, and instead praise the improvements of the interface (as if that shouldn't be expected in the first place). Everyone who had to backtrack hours of play because the darn thing crashed to the desktop just after you finished a tiresome and repetitive dungeon knows what I am talking about.

Vidal Costa
Curitaba, Brazil

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LETTERS

Honorary Blondes

Incredible as it may seem, some readers actually believed Jeff Green when he said he was working on a game called Topless Tami's Sex Gun Orgy (#193). Here are a couple of the more coherent, printable examples.

I would like to participate in the Topless Tami beta testing.

Matthew K.

Could you please send me a copy of the game Topless Tami?

Nicholas G.

Console Yourself

I just read the stupidest article (in the "best selling" PC gaming mag) about the invulnerability of the PC as a gaming platform. This poorly thought nonsense has reinforced my fondness for your fine publication, but I have begun to think seriously about the future of PC gaming magazines, in particular *CGW*.

Over the next two years the battle of the new console systems will be resolved. Two of the competitors have hard drives. For years the only thing separating a large segment of the PC gaming crowd from console systems was the lack of secondary storage.

Watch game designers to see where the future of PC gaming is going. It is cheaper, easier, and faster to develop a game for a console system. Add to this the fact that console games make more money, and the question becomes, "Why would a sane person develop games for the PC?" It's a dollars and cents decision.

I am setting my sights on NEVERWINTER NIGHTS; if this game comes out on consoles as well as PC, I'm going to switch.

The point of this e-mail is to be prepared. I would be very depressed if quality gaming moved to consoles and your fine publication did not.

Glenn Douglass

While the console game-playing experience (on a TV, in the living room, using gamepads) is still different from playing on a PC, we're certainly paying attention to the Xbox, and, to a lesser extent, other consoles, to see how they might affect PC gaming. You are right to suggest following developers; many have announced their intention to develop for next-gen consoles. We are entering a boom phase for consoles, but we don't think it spells the end of PC games. We've seen this pattern before with every major launch of a new platform. Admittedly, Xbox blurs the lines more than ever, so we're covering it where we believe it makes sense.

We'd like to hear from more of you on this issue. Should CGW *cover Xbox a lot, or just those games that will also be coming to the PC? Send your comments to cgwletters@ziffdavis.com.*

Alien Contest Winner

Never underestimate the power of the Beanie Baby, even if it looks like an Alien face-hugger. Some of those who wrote in response to our giveaway offer (Read.me, #194) had unusual and deviant ideas about what to do with it (a codpiece for Halloween?), but most just wanted to scare their wives or girlfriends. And then there was this:

I have a spot on the wall next to my children's pictures reserved for the 'hugger. Before even reading the contest blurb, the picture gave me serious "caesarian section" flashbacks. It looks eerily like the dreams I still suffer from of the doctor hauling my wife's guts onto her chest ("Here's your uterus, and these little guys are your ovaries!").

Nurse: "Here, cut the cord!"
Nauseous Father: "No."
N: "It's very easy."
NF: "No."
N: "Look, you just..."
NF: "Lady, there's a reason you are a medical professional and I studied electrons. They don't bleed."

Jon Cramer

The 'hugger's winging its way out to you now, Jon. May its plush tentacles provide the lasting comfort you so richly deserve.

200th Edition!

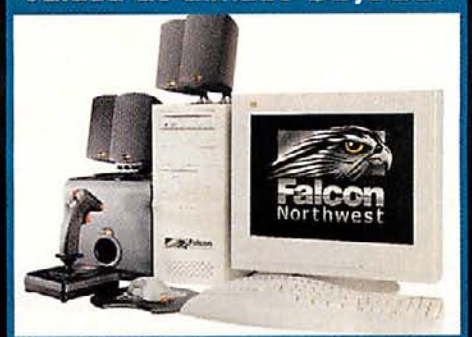
Your Favorite Gaming Moment

We're hard at work preparing our special 200th Anniversary issue, coming in March, 2001. To help us pay tribute to the best of gaming, and to recognize the readers who have been with us all those years (20!), we'd like to hear your stories about your absolute favorite moments in gaming. Please, try to pick just one or two, and try to keep the words below 200 (or we'll never get through them all in time). Then we'll print the best responses in our 200th Collector's Edition. Cgwletters@ziffdavis.com.

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FOR MORE DETAILS AND CONTEST RULES, SEE PAGE 166.

NO PURCHASE NECESSARY. To enter, log on to **www.contest.computergamingworld.com**, and fill in your name and address, Internet or other e-mail address, and daytime and evening phone numbers. One entry per person. Entries must be received by December 5, 2000.

Full System Details: AMD Thunderbird 1000Mhz, 256K L2 cache, 512MB SDRAM, ATX Midtower, IBM Deskstar 60GB ATA100 hard drive, Viewsonic PF790 19-inch .25dp 16x12 flat monitor, Hercules 3D Prophet II GTS 64MB GeForce 2, Keytronics 104 Key, Microsoft IntelliMouse Explorer Optical mouse, Creative Labs Soundblaster Live! X-Gamer sound card, Klipsch Promedia 400-Watt speakers, 3Com V.90 Hardware PCI V.90 modem, Iomega ZIP 100-meg drive, internal, with one disk, Windows '98 Second Edition Plus on CD, full version, TEAC 1.44mb floppy drive, 300 Watt power supply, 2 extra fans, MSI K7T Pro 6330, 6 PCI, 0 ISA, ATA100 motherboard.



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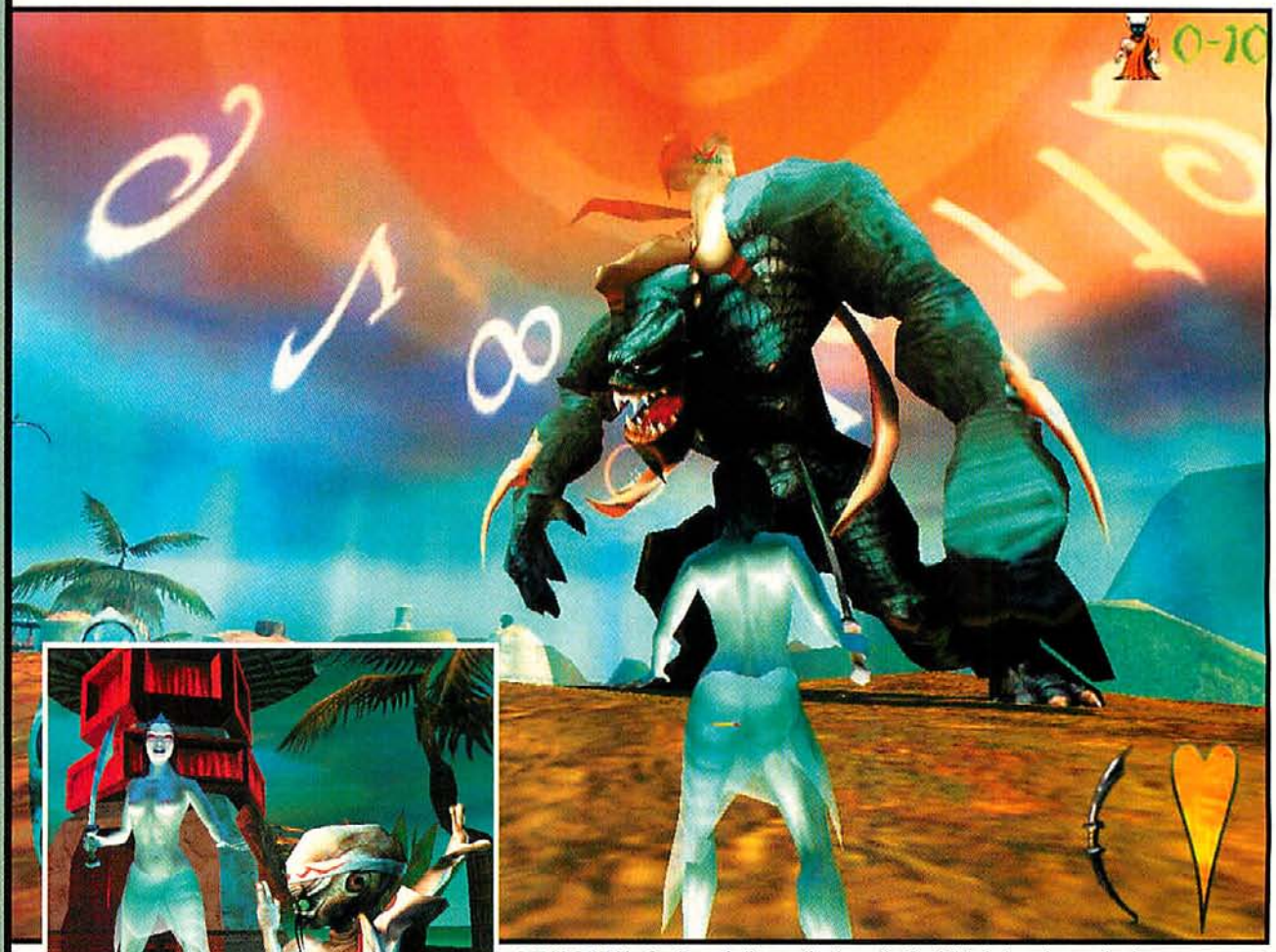
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INSIDE

- Battle.net woes
- Mr. Sneaky
- Quake 3 Team Arena
- Phil Steinmeyer talks Tropico

Giant Strides

Planet Moon rises from dark times to continue work on GIANTS



TIME OUT The Sea Reaper's time spell reduces the Giant Kabuto to a slow-moving lumox.

BRAINS AND BEAUTY The Smarty at right can be put to use building things. Let's hope he doesn't build a bra factory.

■■■ After bursting onto the scene at last year's E3 and stunning the press with its entrancing, imaginative design, GIANTS: CITIZEN KABUTO seemed to vanish as quickly as it appeared. Why the long lull in the action? This was no "normal" three-year development cycle. When lead programmer Andy Astor contracted cancer midway through the project, his long-time colleagues were devastated, says Nick Bruty, president of developer Planet Moon. They had to come to grips with his illness and absence, and find new programmers to get back on track.

Planet Moon (creators of MDK) has since hired two new programmers, and for the last nine months GIANTS has been getting back on its feet.

Bioware on a Tear

With BALDUR'S GATE II nearly finished, Bioware starts new Star Wars RPG

■■■ Could Bioware possibly be having a better year? Hot on the heels of the critically acclaimed MDK2, the red-hot designers now have BALDUR'S GATE II: SHADOWS OF AMN almost ready to ship. If it does even half as well as the first game—and there's no reason to think otherwise—they'll have another blockbuster on their hands.

But that isn't even the big news.

BALDUR'S GATE II CHARACTER ART



Minsc Jaheira Viconia

The big news is that Bioware has been signed to design the first single-player *Star Wars* RPG for the PC. The as-yet untitled game will take place about 4,000 years before *Star Wars: Episode I* (and Jar Jar), a time period centered around the conflicts between the Jedi and the Sith—the evil predecessors of Darth Vader and the Dark Jedi. (Fans can get acquainted with the story through Dark Horse comics' *Tales of the Jedi* trade paperbacks, available at **www.darkhorse.com.**)

This amazing deal is a huge boon for both companies. For LucasArts, it means they have the industry's two most successful RPG developers working on *Star Wars* RPGs: Verant (makers of EVERQUEST) for their multiplayer online game, and Bioware for the single-player game. For Bioware, the win is obvious: They get to make an RPG based on the most popular license in the universe. And for hardcore RPGers, its an enormous boost to the genre's prestige.

But they still have to finish BALDUR'S GATE II. We've been playing a pre-release version with almost the entire game on it, and its new higher-res graphics look great (take that, DIABLO II!). Next month, we'll bring you a behind-the-scenes look at Bioware as they finish up the game, and we'll have the world's only BG2 demo on our CD. Make it your quest next month. —*Jeff Green*

With the game now in its final stages and expected to be complete soon, the fruits of this talented team's labor is obvious from the solid beta version we've been playing. What's even better is that Astor has made a remarkable recovery, and has rejoined the group to see the project through.

GIANTS' design hasn't changed much since our preview last August. Three different races of playable species find themselves on an idyllic world, struggling for control. The resulting experience will be an action game peppered with RTS elements, topped off with a portion of off-beat humor, accented by a stunning graphics engine.

You start out controlling a team of high-tech troopers known as the Meccaryns. Along the way, you'll encounter two distinctly different races and a menagerie of ferocious fauna that you'll have to elude or destroy. You'll also have to deal with the Sea Reapers, and of course the game's 800-pound gorilla, the Giant Kabuto, both of whom are fighting for control of the world. What keeps things interesting is the match up—Meccs have heavy weaponry and various gadgets, including a Gyrocopter for buzzing around the island. The Sea Reapers possess magic ability, while the Giant Kabuto relies primarily on his brute force.



TAKE THAT A Reaper lets fly an arrow that messes with Kabuto's program.

Plans for GIANTS include a mess o' multiplayer options, including deathmatch, team deathmatch, and CTF. Borrowing a page from TRIBES, the Mecc's Gyrocopter seats three—a pilot and two guys riding rocket launcher. Rather than create several races more similar than different, the GIANTS team is instead pitting tech weapons against magic against Godzilla-like mayhem. And the sum of those parts should make for a very interesting game cocktail. —*Dave Salvator*

The GOOD...

HALO FOR ALL



Macintosh and PC gamers can breathe again now that Microsoft announced that HALO will be coming to these platforms. A new company headed by former Bungie exec Peter Tamte will also be converting several good Microsoft games for the Mac (including AGE OF EMPIRES II, LINKS LS, and FLIGHT SIMULATOR). Mac gamers can thank Microsoft for doing what Apple promised to do for years—and never actually did.

The BAD...

DEPARTING DEVELOPERS



More PC developers have announced their intention to make games for one of the upcoming console platforms. GIANTS developer Planet Moon revealed that their next game will be for Xbox or PlayStation 2, while EA cancelled DUNGEON KEEPER 3 to focus on console titles. We've seen this pattern before and we know PC gaming isn't dying, but it will be in for some leaner times while developers seek their fortunes elsewhere.

and the UGLY

BLAME CANADA



We still can't understand Canada's idiotic labeling of SOLDIER OF FORTUNE as an "adult film." In doing so, Canada effectively banned it, because retailers need a special license to sell porn. In another well-intentioned but misguided effort, the Mayor of Philadelphia passed a law restricting violent arcade games from anyone under 18. Thank heavens we're finally getting to the heart of why kids are violent, and making sure that our youth can't experience these shocking virtual scenes. Now, what time's the hockey game?

THIEF IS BACK FROM THE DEAD: A FORMER THIEF PROGRAMMER REPORTS THAT EIDOS SNAGGED THE FRANCHISE, INCLUDING CODE TO THE NEW ENGINE, AND HAS HANDED IT OVER TO WARREN SPECTOR (DEUS EX) OF ION STORM.

EMBATTLED BATTLE.NET

Blizzard belatedly beefs up bandwidth for booming DIABLO II popularity



"DIABLO 2 sales have been unprecedented," Blizzard's Bill Roper told CGW. Unfortunately, that's not all that's unprecedented about DIABLO 2. More than any other Blizzard game, DIABLO 2 has been plagued by problems, and it's taken some of the bloom off Blizzard's rosy relationship with its fans.

Battle.net, Blizzard's gaming network, has been overwhelmed with DIABLO 2 players since the game's release, and many players have experienced lengthy delays before starting a game. As one frustrated fan wrote, "Starting a game online takes about 10 to 15 minutes of CONSTANT typing and retyping the game name and password until the game finally gets to the load screen. At this point, you have a 40 percent chance of actually starting and a 60 percent chance of getting the 'Failed to Join Game' screen." Unfortunately, this experience unfortunately has not been isolated. According to Roper, the explanation for the problems is simple.

"Nothing could have prepared us for the incredible sales level of this game. In our first full month of STARCRAFT, we sold something like 187,000 units. With DIABLO 2, we sold 148,000 in one day, and in one weekend we had surpassed STARCRAFT's sales," he says.

In other words, Battle.net has been a victim of DIABLO 2's success. "We went in with what we thought was an aggressive amount of bandwidth and servers for the release of DIABLO 2—56 servers for the U.S. alone. In one week, all our copies of the game were gone. Our warehouse was empty and we had to reorder."

Roper says that Blizzard is doing everything it can to fix the situation. "We're in 'hair-on-fire-got-to-get-some-stuff-out-there' mode. We will probably double the number of servers we currently have," he said. "In the next week, we'll be deploying an additional 36, bringing the total to 92 for the U.S."

Roper noted that it's not as simple as going to the store and buying some new computers and installing them. "It is not a trivial matter to add servers; it takes considerable time and money to make the increases in capacity and bandwidth. We have four Realm servers: US West in Los Angeles, US East in New York, the European Realm in Norway, and the Asian Realm in Seoul. It will take a week or two to get everything online, since we have to go through customs, coordinate with phone companies, and so on."

It's not just a capacity issue that fans are complaining about, though. There are other issues with the game and the way the multiplayer service is being run. Some servers have been taken down during prime-time playing hours for upgrades. Why then? "It depends on when we have to make a change," Roper says. "Sometimes we try to get upgrades and updates installed as quickly as possible, and sometimes we've had emergency situations where we had to fix something immediately." He added that DIABLO 2 is Blizzard's first client-server game. "We're kind of learning as we go, and at the same time, we have the challenge of doing it in a public arena."

To compound the issue, the Macintosh version is now shipping. Will that cause even more overcrowding? "We don't expect it to have much of an impact," he says. What about the misleading "Servers down" message players get when the servers are full? "We're changing that in the 1.03 patch." Finally, what about publishing a known list



ARCANUM HAS BEEN DELAYED UNTIL FEBRUARY, TO INCORPORATE FEEDBACK FROM THE PUBLIC BETA PROGRAM STARTING IN SEPTEMBER. THOSE INTERESTED IN TESTING THE UPCOMING RPG FROM SIERRA STUDIOS SHOULD GO TO WWW.ARCANUM1.COM FOR MORE INFO.

The Latest Heaping Pile of Rumors, Innuendo, and Gossip

STEALTHMODE

By Generalissimo Fransneakio Franco

■■■ It pays to lose money! Mattel's Jill Barad somehow walked away with $50 million in severance pay after losing hundreds of millions, mostly from her acquisition of The Learning Company. Following her lead, several top dogs at Eidos are lunging for bonuses, despite the company losing so much money—nearly $50 million—that it's been put up for sale. Nearly $18 million in bonuses have been paid to the CEO and six other top executives. I guess the "Hey, let's make more TOMB RAIDER games!" business model is good for manufacturing some nice golden parachutes. Too bad it didn't manufacture profits.

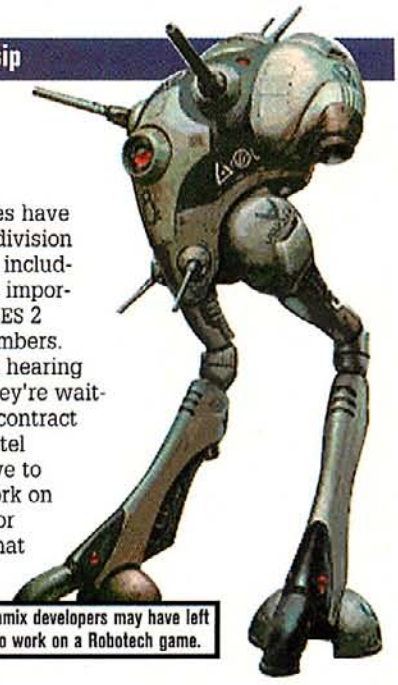
The French have leaked the fifth race in WARCRAFT 3. We already knew about humans, orcs, demons, and the undead, but a flyer included in the French version of DIABLO 2 mentions "Elves of the Night" as being the fifth race—that's Dark Elves to us English speakers.

The game concept that Brian Reynolds and Big Huge Games are shopping around to publishers is an AGE OF EMPIRES-like strategy game. They want to add greater complexity and detail to give it even more of a CIVILIZATION flavor, however.

Texas is fast becoming a center for massively-multiplayer games, with ex-Origin employees Rich Vogel and Raph "Designer Dragon" Koster now working as employees for Verant Interactive. Vogel and Koster were instrumental in developing ULTIMA ONLINE and had worked on PRIVATEER ONLINE, the cancellation of which helped push them over the edge with Origin. They're rumored to be working on the STAR WARS ONLINE game for Sony.

Speaking of massively multiplayer, it's not exactly a secret but Square Co. announced that they are going to do an online-only, persistent world game based on their FINAL FANTASY series. They hope to attract a whopping two million players. Meanwhile, Maxis is seriously considering an online, multiplayer version of THE SIMS.

You may have seen that a lot of Dynamix employees have left that division of Sierra, including some important TRIBES 2 team members. What I'm hearing is that they're waiting on a contract from Mattel Interactive to begin work on a game for them. What game?



Some Dynamix developers may have left TRIBES 2 to work on a Robotech game.

Probably something to do with the Robotech license that Mattel snatched up last month.

Hasbro Interactive seems to be of several minds about X-COM games. You may remember that they killed an unannounced X-COM GENESIS project that much work had gone into when they went through corporate-wide layoffs. Now, a Hasbro employee let it slip out that they are again working on more X-COM titles. Besides X-COM ALLIANCE, they are also planning something called X-COM 7 (a return to the roots of X-COM), and X-COM ENFORCER, a fast-playing action game.

Finally, some intriguing news from Interplay's Black Isle, the RPG stalwarts responsible for the FALLOUT series, PLANESCAPE: TORMENT, and ICEWIND DALE. They are using the LithTech 2.0 engine to create a new game, and here's their vague yet teasing allusions to what they are creating: "The majority of the team who created PLANESCAPE:TORMENT is onboard....The game will be a Black Isle-style role-playing game. This project is not FALLOUT 3 or TORMENT 2. It is real-time. We will have single and multiplayer modes." Hmmm...most sneakilicious of them!

BATTLENET

of bugs?

"That would be a long list. We have our staff working on it and we're very aware of what the issues are," Roper says. "We have 200 bugs listed in our database but only four are Type 1 bugs now. These crash the game. We have 12 Type 2 bugs that cause severe problems. The rest are minor. We're very anal-retentive about logging bugs, even if they can't be reproduced."

Roper did say that DIABLO 2 was up to snuff as far as Blizzard is concerned. "It does meet our exacting standards as far as having bugs. The first patch took about as long as any of our other patches. It was ready right before the game shipped, due to the added delays of doing a simultaneous worldwide release. DIABLO 2 is a more complex game with a more complex client-server model than we've ever done before. We're extremely dedicated to getting the problems fixed. I just hope that people hang with us for the next couple of weeks while we get the new hardware out."

—Mark Asher

5, 10, 15 Years Ago in CGW

15

October 1985

This issue featured a hot report from the Chicago Consumer Electronics Show. So hot, in fact, that we dedicated *one full page* to it! The hot new games previewed included the original GUNSHIP, LODE RUNNER'S RESCUE, CAPTAIN GOODNIGHT, and WINTER GAMES. The most interesting fact reported: A company named Nintendo was going to release an entirely new game system.



10

October 1990

Forget the preview of future Hall-of-Famer RED BARON. Forget the annotated "paiktography" of pre 19th-Century wargames. Forget—if you can—the detailed mathematical analysis of units in the game EMPIRE, including seven charts and two graphs. The big news this issue: The unveiling of the *CGW* computer screwdriver. Can you believe we *gave away* this miracle of technology to the first 500 self-addressed, stamped envelopes? Gosh, were we stupid.



5

October 1995

Flight sim nuts were soiling their flight suits over the news that publisher Jane's was teaming up with Electronic Arts on a series of new sims. The two had quite a run over the past five years, releasing some of the best products ever in the category. Alas, the run appears to be over, as EA has mothballed the Jane's line. Time to fly WWII FIGHTERS one last time—in a missing man formation.



RUNE™

Prepare yourself for Rune, a brutal new third person action/adventure game steeped in the infamy of Norse mythology and Viking lore, built on the Unreal Tournament engine, and coming soon from Human Head Studios.

- WHIRLWIND THIRD PERSON MELEE ACTION
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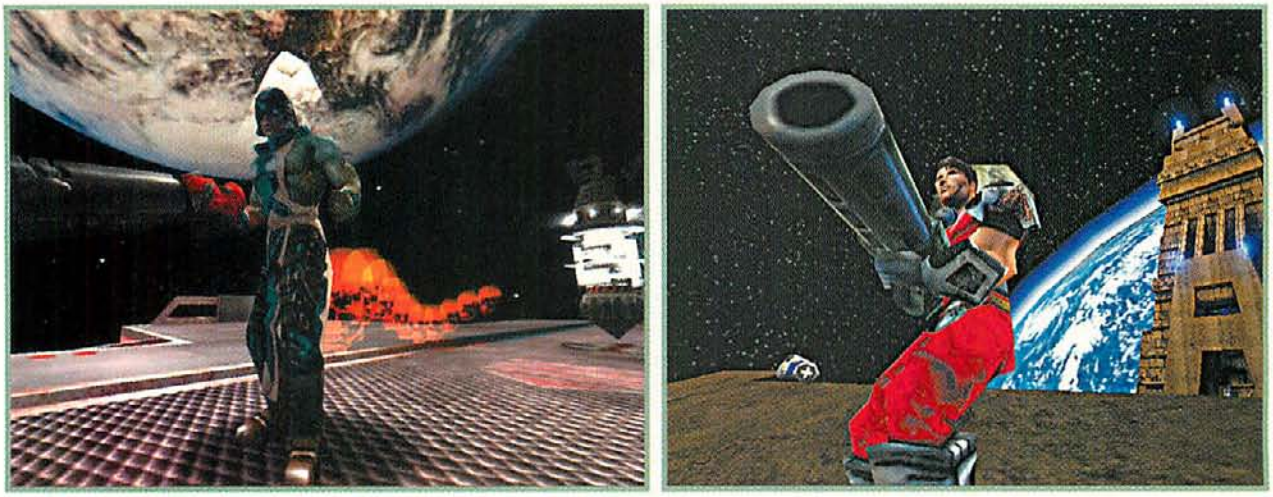






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CROTEAM IS ON A ROLL. NOT LONG AFTER THE GATHERING OF DEVELOPERS AGREED TO PUBLISH SERIOUS SAM, DEREK SMART REVEALED THAT HE PAID $100,000 TO THE CROATIAN DEVELOPERS TO LICENSE THEIR ENGINE FOR A "POSSIBLE NON-BATTLECRUISER PC/XBOX GAME."



Judging by the similarity of QUAKE 3 TEAM ARENA (left) to UNREAL TOURNAMENT (right), it's easy to see the inspiration for id's latest effort.

QUAKE 3 TEAM ARENA offers team-based play, for a price

Id's Answer to UT

Id Software invented the first-person shooter, and for years they dominated deathmatch. But that ended abruptly with the release of UNREAL TOURNAMENT, whose team-based game options and more creative level design took id by surprise.

QUAKE III TEAM ARENA strikes a blow back for the Texas originals. Our half-day, late-stage playtest at id's offices convinced us that the QUAKE boys are serious about recapturing their crown. Unfortunately, it won't be a free add-on, but here's why you'll want it anyway:

Team play: Team Arena features four game types—the typical Capture The Flag and One-Flag games, plus two new ones. In Overload, you must destroy the skull-artifact in the enemy base to score. Destroying the artifact takes a lot of damage, so you're vulnerable during the attack. In Harvester, you have to retrieve the souls of your slain comrades from a central point, and carry them to your opponents' base.

New Power-ups: The scout booster increases your speed and jumping ability—perfect when you have the enemy flag. The Guard power-up gives you 200 armor and health points. Invulnerability makes you impervious, but also freezes your position. The teleporter is also nifty: In some maps, it transports you into a nether region containing the BFG and access to both bases.

New weapons: An improved nail gun shoots a shotgun blast of nails, each of which does 30 points of damage. A new proximity mine will help with base defense, and a chain gun spits out shells and bullets at an obscene rate.

New level designs: Emphasizing wide-open, hyperspeed action, Team Arena's new maps create some amazing moments. The bases will be symmetrically designed with arrows pointing the way to the enemy base, so newbies will have an easier time learning the level.

New tournament single-player mode: You can play TEAM ARENA in single-player mode with bots, like UT. As in QUAKE 3: ARENA, there's a mission in solo play: You have to win a series of multiplayer maps with your teammates, and then face bigger baddies in one-on-one arena combat.

QUAKE III TEAM ARENA should be on store shelves in late September. —*George Jones*

FEATURE SHOOTOUT: Q3 TEAM ARENA vs. UT Too little, too late? Not quite. UT still has the edge over Q3TEAM ARENA in some key areas, but TA should add enough to level the playing field (and stop UT from kicking dust in its face). Since neither game completely dominates the team-based playing field, the Internet debates over which is better will rage anew.

QUAKE III TEAM ARENA	*UNREAL TOURNAMENT*	*Edge*
Team-based scenarios: CTF, One Flag, Overlord, Harvester	**Team-based scenarios:** CTF, Domination, Assault	**It's a tie.** Both have CTF; Overlord and Harvester sound good, but Assault alone makes UT stand out.
Power-ups: Scout, Guard, Invulnerability, Teleporter	**Power-ups:** Damage Amplifier, Shield-belt, Invisibility, Runes (from UT Bonus Pack)	**Possibly Q3TA.** Runes enhanced UT's conventional power-ups, but the new TA ones sound even better.
Weapons: Shot-Nailgun, Proximity Mine, Chaingun, in addition to traditional Q3A Arsenal	**Weapons:** Standard UT Arsenal	UT still has the edge. There's no equivalent to TA's Proximity Mine, but the UT arsenal is still more interesting.
New level design: Wide-open, symmetrical levels	**Level design:** Too varied to describe	UT's matchless mix of symmetrical and non-symmetrical levels raised the bar incredibly high.
New tournament: Tweaked single-player allows you to play team-scenarios with bots.	**Same tournament:** You already played with team bots in this.	UT. If Q3 had team-based gameplay built in, id wouldn't be playing catch up right now.

ORIGIN SYSTEMS WILL HOST THE FIRST ULTIMA ONLINE PLAYER CONVENTION AT THE AUSTIN CONVENTION CENTER NOVEMBER 10-11. THE EVENT WILL FEATURE MORE THAN 50 PANELS, WORKSHOPS AND ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSIONS ON ALL THINGS UO. REGISTER FOR WORLD FAIRE 2000 AT WWW.UO.COM/FAIRE.

CGW PROFILE

Phil Steinmeyer



Why is the engineer of RAILROAD TYCOON II and HEROES OF MIGHT & MAGIC acting like a dictator?

Tropico. Is that a game or a nightclub where Ricky Martin performs?
Tropico is a strategy game where you play a Castro-ish figure running a Caribbean island, jailing your opponents, oppressing your people, and filling up your Swiss bank account, as the case may be. I think you're confusing it with Tropico 2, the sequel, where you're a Menudo-ish figure running a Salsa band, trying to shake your bon-bon, impress your 13-year old groupies, and score a second hit to revive your flagging fortunes.

You grabbed the Railroad Tycoon license from Microprose, somewhat to Sid Meier's surprise. Will we see any dinosaurs in Tropico?
Tropico and Jurassic Park are both set on remote islands in the Caribbean. The leaders in Tropico and Jurassic Park both try to draw American tourists and their hefty wallets. Both games climax with everybody being eaten by... whoops I've said too much, you'll just have to buy the game and find out for yourself.

What's your favorite game?
My favorite relatively recent games are Total Annihilation and Fallout 1 & 2. I loved the early Sid Meier games.

PopTop was just acquired by Take 2. What's the stupidest thing about running your own company?
Lawyers. I'm married to a lawyer. Most of my college buddies turned into lawyers. My brother's a lawyer. I can't stand 'em (the lawyering part—they're all quite honorable and nice people, otherwise).

Are you worried about offending Fidel Castro with Tropico, a thinly-veiled look at Cuba?
At least Castro doesn't put death sentences on the heads of those who poke fun at him. There's a reason we went after Cuba, rather than say, Iran. Salman, buddie, I feel for 'ya.

Castro's kind of ugly—the beard and all.... What if gamers don't want to play a Castro-like guy?
You can play the game however you want. You can even be (gasp!) a democratic leader, treat your people well, and implement all the latest plans for your people's welfare that the United Nations happens to be pushing at the moment. Of course, there aren't too many democratically-elected leaders who've managed to stay in power for 40 years.

Your people's welfare...you mean there's more to running a country than a luxurious presidential palace and a fat Swiss bank account?
The peasants can be so annoying—they want good housing, adequate food, churches for the spirit, sports arenas for entertainment...the list is endless. Sometimes, though, its easier to fulfill their wishes than to declare martial law.

Does your wife understand games, or does she just roll her eyes a lot?
More eye-rolling than anything else. Of course, I roll my eyes when she starts talking about lawyer stuff.

Seen the Killcreek photos? What do you think? (It's okay, Phil—your wife won't read this!)
She had a talented surgeon. But I only have eyes for my lovely wife. Yes, she will read this.

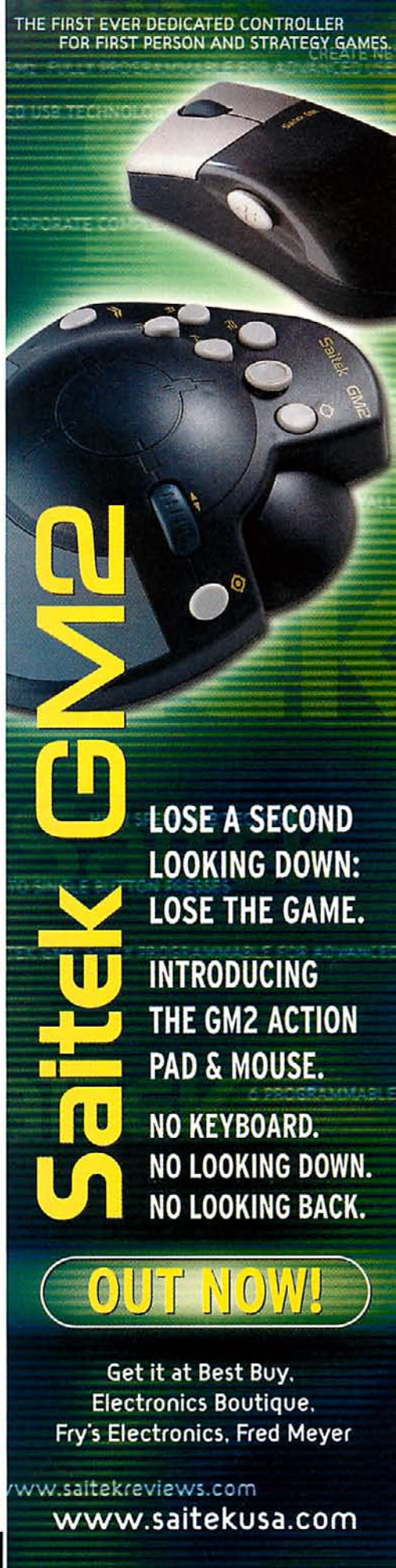
How do you celebrate finishing a game?
One long 12-14 hour sleep-in, followed by going right back into the office to work on the German version, French version, demo version, etc.
—interview by Mark Asher

PopTop Hops On Take 2 Train

Take 2 recently acquired PopTop Studios, developer of last year's RAILROAD TYCOON 2 and next year's TROPICO. PopTop, formerly owned by Phil Steinmeyer, will remain in St. Louis and continue to operate much like an independent development group for Take 2.

Steinmeyer says he initiated the sale because, "I got really burned out spending time on the business side of things. This deal will allow us to focus on developing games, which is our strength. If we continued as an independent, I'd end up working almost solely on business issues. That's not what I wanted."

Steinmeyer said the sale should have no impact on the development of TROPICO, a tongue-in-cheek strategy game where players assume the role of dictator of a banana republic. TROPICO is slated for a Q1 2001 release.



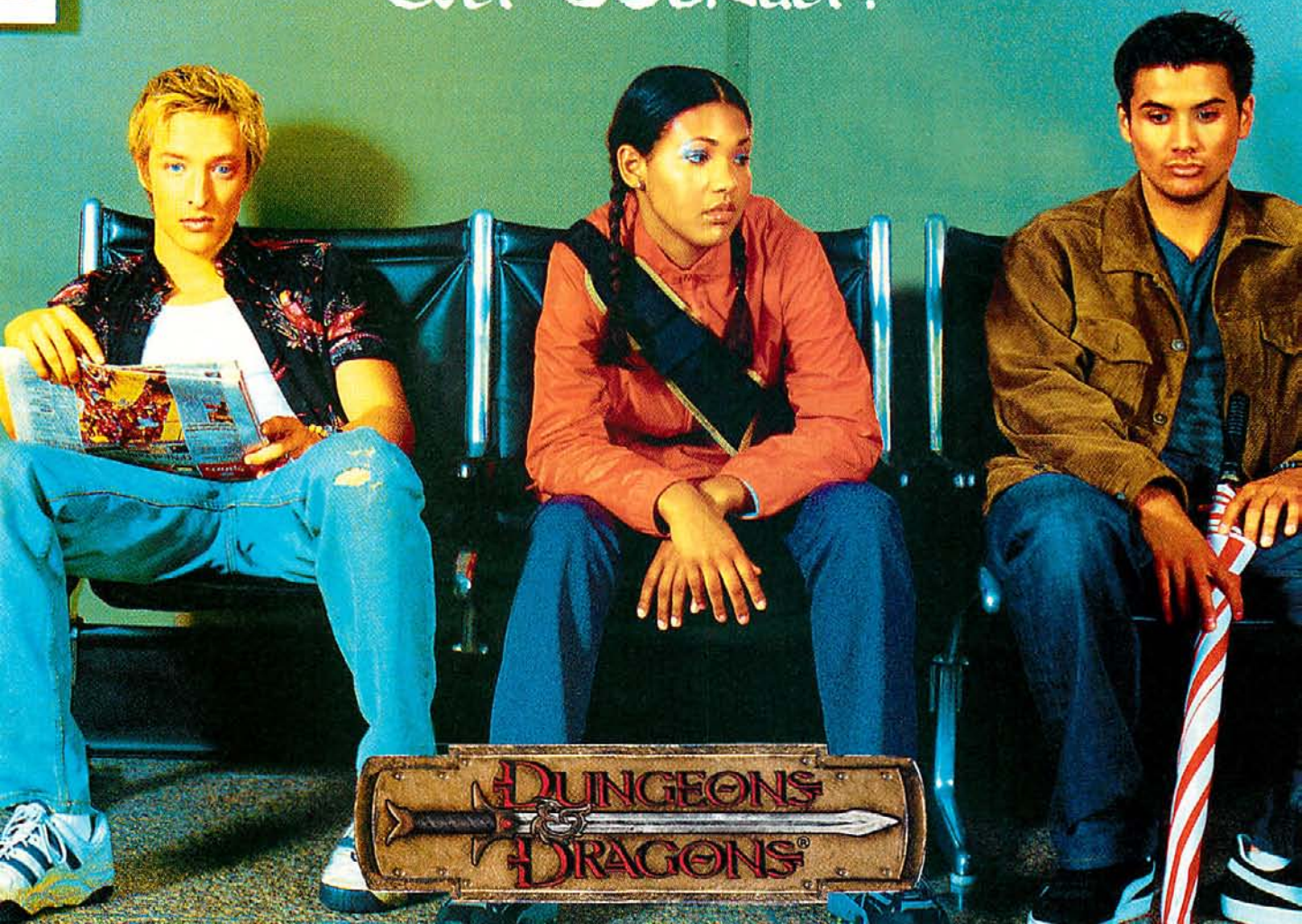
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Find Yourself. Somewhere Else.

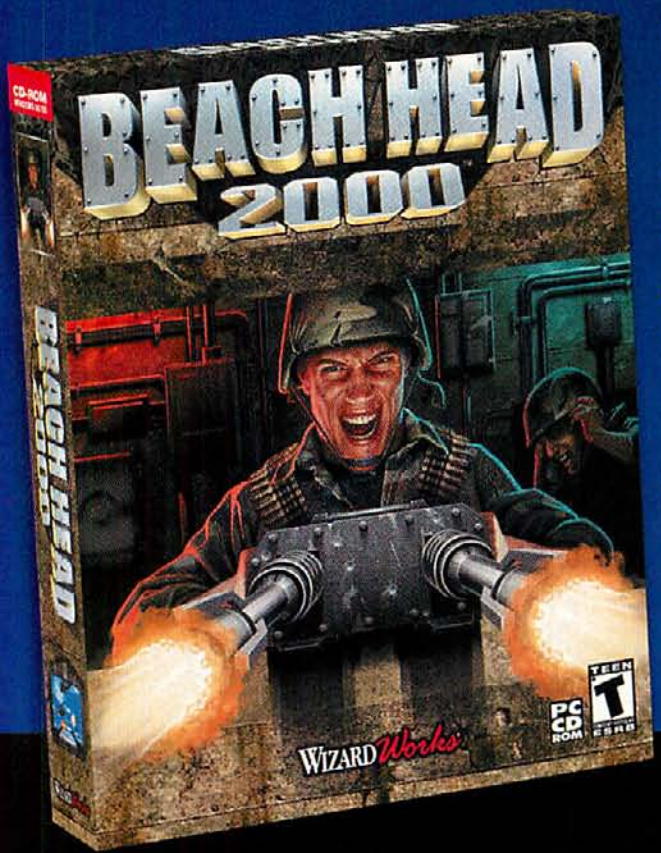
you had the strength to crush steel and bone?
you could bend reality to your will?
your thoughts became deeds of valor?

Ever Wonder?



DEFEND OR DIE!





You are the last line of defense against an overwhelming enemy assault. Blast away at land, sea and air forces as they rush you from every direction. Clear the beach, defend your post and pray that the supply plane comes in time!

IT AIN'T NO BEACH PARTY

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- In your face hardcore photo-realistic 3D action!
- Wave after wave of intense enemy assaults!

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pipeline

We know that game developers tend to use dartboards when determining release dates, so we broke out with even bigger dartboards for the Pipeline. Sometimes, we'll nail the release down to the month; other times we'll give the developers some breathing room by using a general season. Also, we'll highlight some of the more notable releases and pass some preliminary judgement on them before the real reviews are written. Lastly, if you're a publisher, make sure you tell us where your darts have been hitting so that we're not completely blind, okay? Send notices to: cgwpipeline@zd.com

Recent Releases

HEAVY METAL: F.A.K.K. 2



We're a bit disappointed that the game's been toned down. We also want to see if Ritual can make up for Activision's mishandling of SIN. But we remember SCOURGE OF ARMAGON, and we're hoping that Ritual will have the stunning level design and gameplay to overcome our worries.

CRIMSON SKIES



There's a reason why Inside Simulations columnist Gordon Berg thinks the fate of the sim genre rests on this game. It's accessible to newbies, and the hardcore will now have a sim to just plain have fun with. Besides, name another game that'll let you shoot down zeppelins to the tune of swing jazz?

SUDDEN STRIKE



Think COMMAND & CONQUER in World War II, and you get the idea. The action is fast and not terribly realistic, but it's a blast throwing soldiers, tanks, and planes around with reckless abandon. Exquisite detail and destructible environments are some of this game's strengths.

	THEY SAY	WE SAY
UPDATE 4 x 4 Evolution G.O.D.	Winter 2000	Spring 2001
Age Of Empires II Expansion: The Conquerors Microsoft	Summer 2000	Fall 2000
American McGee's Alice EA	Winter 2000	December 2000
UPDATE Anachronox Eidos	September 2000	Winter 2000
NEW Ann McCaffrey's Freedom: First Resistance Red Storm Entertainment	Winter 2000	December 2000
UPDATE Arcanum Sierra	Summer 2000	October 2000
B-17 Flying Fortress Hasbro	Fall 2000	Fall 2000
NEW Battlecruiser Millennium 3000AD Inc.	December 2000	December 2000
Battle Isle: The Andosia War Blue Byte	October 2000	October 2000
NEW Battle Isle: Darkspace Blue Byte	Spring 2001	Spring 2001
Battle Of Britain Rowan Software	Winter 2000	Winter 2000
Battle Realms Crave Entertainment	Summer 2001	Summer 2001
Black & White EA	Summer 2000	Fall 2000
Blair Witch Project(s) G.O.D.	Winter 2000	Spring 2001
Civilization: Call To Power 2 Activision	Fall 2000	October 2000
Clive Barker's Undying EA	Winter 2000	November 2000
Close Combat: Utah Beach Mattel	Winter 2000	Winter 2000
Combat Flight Simulator 2 Microsoft	Winter 2000	Winter 2000
Command & Conquer: Red Alert 2 Westwood	Winter 2000	November 2000
Command & Conquer: Renegade Westwood	Fall 2000	Winter 2000
Commandos 2 Eidos	Winter 2000	November 2000
Conquest: Frontier Wars Microsoft	Fall 2000	Fall 2000
Destroyer Command Mattel	Winter 2000	Winter 2000
Dragon's Lair 3D Blue Byte	Spring 2001	April 2001
UPDATE Dreamland Chronicles: Freedom Ridge Bethesda	Spring 2001	February 2001
UPDATE Duke Nukem Forever 3D Realms	Spring 2001	March 2001
UPDATE Dungeon Siege Microsoft	Spring 2001	August 2001
Echelon Bethesda	Winter 2000	Winter 2000
Elder Scrolls: Morrowind Bethesda	Winter 2001	Winter 2001
Empire Earth Sierra	Spring 2001	Summer 2001
Escape From Monkey Island LucasArts	Fall 2000	Winter 2000
Evil Dead: Hail To The King THQ	Fall 2000	Fall 2000
NEW Fallout Tactics: Brotherhood Of Steel Interplay	Spring 2001	Spring 2001
Fly! II G.O.D.	Winter 2000	Spring 2001
Freelancer Microsoft	Winter 2000	Spring 2001
NEW Galactic Commander Online 3000AD Inc.	Spring 2001	Summer 2001
Giants: Citizen Kabuto Interplay	Winter 2000	Winter 2000
Halo Bungie	Winter 2000	January 2001
Harpoon 4 Hasbro	Winter 2000	Winter 2000
Hitman: Code 47 Eidos	Summer 2000	September 2000
IHRA Drag Racing Bethesda	Fall 2000	Fall 2000
NEW IL-2 Sturmovik Blue Byte	Spring 2001	Spring 2001
I'm Going In Eidos	Fall 2000	October 2000
Kingdom Under Fire G.O.D.	Summer 2000	Fall 2000
Legends Of Might & Magic 3DO	Winter 2000	Winter 2000
Loose Cannon Microsoft	Winter 2000	Winter 2000

	THEY SAY	WE SAY
Magic & Mayhem 2: The Art Of Magic Bethesda	Spring 2001	Spring 2001
Max Payne G.O.D.	Winter 2000	February 2001
MechCommander 2 Microsoft	Spring 2001	Summer 2001
MechWarrior 4 Microsoft	Fall 2000	Winter 2000
Metal Gear Solid PC Microsoft	Fall 2000	Fall 2000
NEW Midtown Madness 2 Microsoft	Winter 2000	Winter 2000
UPDATE Motor City Online Electronic Arts	Winter 2000	Spring 2001
NEW NASCAR Racing 4 Sierra	Winter 2000	Spring 2001
Neverwinter Nights Interplay	April 2001	Summer 2001
No One Lives Forever Fox Interactive	Winter 2000	December 2000
Oni Bungie	Summer 2000	Fall 2000
NEW Panzer General III: Scorched Earth Mattel Interactive	September 2000	September 2000
Pool Of Radiance II SSI	Winter 2000	Winter 2000
Praetorians Eidos	Spring 2001	March 2001
Reach for the Stars Mattel	Spring 2000	Fall 2000
UPDATE Republic: The Revolution Eidos	Spring 2001	Winter 2001
Red Faction THQ	Spring 2001	Spring 2001
Return To Wolfenstein Activision	November 2000	November 2000
Rune G.O.D.	Fall 2000	November 2000
Sanity Monolith	Summer 2000	Fall 2000
Sea Dogs Bethesda	Winter 2000	Winter 2000
Settlers IV Blue Byte	November 2000	November 2000
Sid Meier's Civilization III Hasbro	Summer 2001	Fall 2001
Sid Meier's Dinosaur!	Winter 2001	Winter 2001
Sigma Microsoft	Summer 2001	Fall 2001
Silent Hunter II SSI	Winter 2000	Summer 2001
SimMars EA	Fall 2000	Spring 2001
Simsville EA	Spring 2001	Spring 2001
Sovereign Sony Online Entertainment	Fall 2000	Winter 2000
Squad Leader Hasbro	Winter 2000	Winter 2000
Star Trek Deep Space 9: The Fallen Simon & Schuster Interactive	September 2000	September 2000
Star Trek Voyager: Elite Force Activision	September 2000	September 2000
Startopia Eidos	Winter 2000	November 2000
Star Wars Episode I: Obi-Wan LucasArts	Fall 2000	Winter 2000
Sudden Strike CDV	Fall 2000	September 2000
Summoner THQ	Fall 2000	Fall 2000
UPDATE Team Fortress 2 Sierra	May 2001	Fall 2001
The World Is Not Enough EA	Fall 2000	Fall 2000
Throne Of Darkness Sierra	Summer 2000	Winter 2000
Tribes 2 Sierra	Summer 2000	Fall 2000
UPDATE Tropico G.O.D.	Spring 2001	March 2001
WarCraft III Blizzard	Spring 2001	Summer 2001
Warlords IV Mattel Interactive	Spring 2001	Spring 2001
Waterloo Breakaway Games	Winter 2000	Winter 2000
Wizards & Warriors Activision	Winter 2000	Winter 2000
Zeus: Master Of Olympus Sierra	Fall 2000	September 2000

Top 40

CGW's Monthly Readers' Poll

This Month	Last Month	Game/ Publisher	CGW Rating
1	1	**Half-Life** Havas	5
2	2	**Age of Empires II: Age of Kings** Microsoft	5
3	4	**Unreal Tournament** Epic/GT	5
4	3	**Baldur's Gate** Interplay	4
5	8	**Rainbow Six: Rogue Spear** Red Storm	4.5
6	5	**StarCraft: Brood War** Havas	5
7	9	**Quake III Arena** Activision	3.5
8	6	**The Sims** Electronic Arts	5
9	10	**Half-Life: Opposing Force** Havas	3.5
10	7	**Homeworld** Havas	4.5
NEW	11	–	**Diablo II** Havas	5
12	12	**Sid Meier's Alpha Centauri** Firaxis	5
13	16	**System Shock 2** Electronic Arts	4.5
14	14	**Thief: The Dark Project** Eidos	4.5
15	11	**Planescape: Torment** Interplay	5
16	24	**Need for Speed: Porsche Unleashed** Electronic Arts	4.5
17	15	**Final Fantasy VII** Eidos	4.5
18	13	**Heroes of Might & Magic III** 3DO	4.5
19	28	**Soldier of Fortune** Activision	2.5
20	17	**Fallout 2** Interplay	4
21	18	**Grim Fandango** LucasArts	4.5
22	19	**SimCity 3000** Electronic Arts	4
23	22	**Roller Coaster Tycoon** Hasbro	4
24	27	**Thief 2** Eidos	4.5
25	20	**Command & Conquer: Tiberian Sun** Electronic Arts	4
26	25	**Freespace 2** Interplay	4.5
27	21	**Final Fantasy VIII** Eidos	2
28	26	**MechWarrior 3** Hasbro	3
29	23	**Baldur's Gate: Tales of the Sword Coast** Interplay	4
30	33	**FIFA 2000** Electronic Arts	4.5
31	29	**Age of Empires: Rise of Rome** Microsoft	4
32	34	**Total Annihilation: Core Contingency** Cavedog	4.5
33	30	**Worms Armageddon** Hasbro	4
NEW	34	–	**Combat Mission** Big Time Software	5
NEW	35	–	**Shogun: Total War** Electronic Arts	4.5
36	36	**NHL 2000** Electronic Arts	3.5
37	31	**Dungeon Keeper II** Electronic Arts	4.5
38	32	**EverQuest** Sony	4
NEW	39	–	**Vampire: The Masquerade** Activision	1.5
40	40	**Jagged Alliance 2** TalonSoft	4.5

NEW POLLING PLACE!

Vote in the Top 40 Games poll at www.computergaming.com. The more people who vote, the better the results, but please vote only once per month.

Welcome, DIABLO II, we're so glad you could fina ly join us. We're also glad to see the twin poste children for new age wargames–COMBA MISSION and SHOGUN–debut side by side. It's particular ly noteworthy that CM landed on the Top 40 so quickly given no marketing whatsoever and online-only distribution Chalk one up for an indie. VAMPIRE also made a surpris ingly strong showing–let's see how long it can stand bein in the spotlight.

Top Action Games

This Month	Game/ Publisher	CGW Rating
1	**Half-Life** Havas	5
2	**Unreal Tournament** Epic/GT	5
3	**Rainbow Six: Rogue Spear** Red Storm	4.5
4	**Quake III Arena** id/Activision	4.5
5	**Half-Life: Opposing Force** Havas	3.5

Top Adventure/RPG Games

This Month	Game/ Publisher	CGW Rating
1	**Baldur's Gate** Interplay	4.5
2	**Diablo II** Havas	5
3	**System Shock 2** Electronic Arts	4.5
4	**Planescape: Torment** Interplay	5
5	**Final Fantasy VII** Eidos	4.5

Top Simulations Games

This Month	Game/ Publisher	CGW Rating
1	**Freespace 2** Interplay	4.5
2	**MechWarrior 3** Hasbro	3
3	**Falcon 4.0** Hasbro	3.5
4	**European Air War** Hasbro	4
5	**World War II Fighters** Electronic Arts	4.5

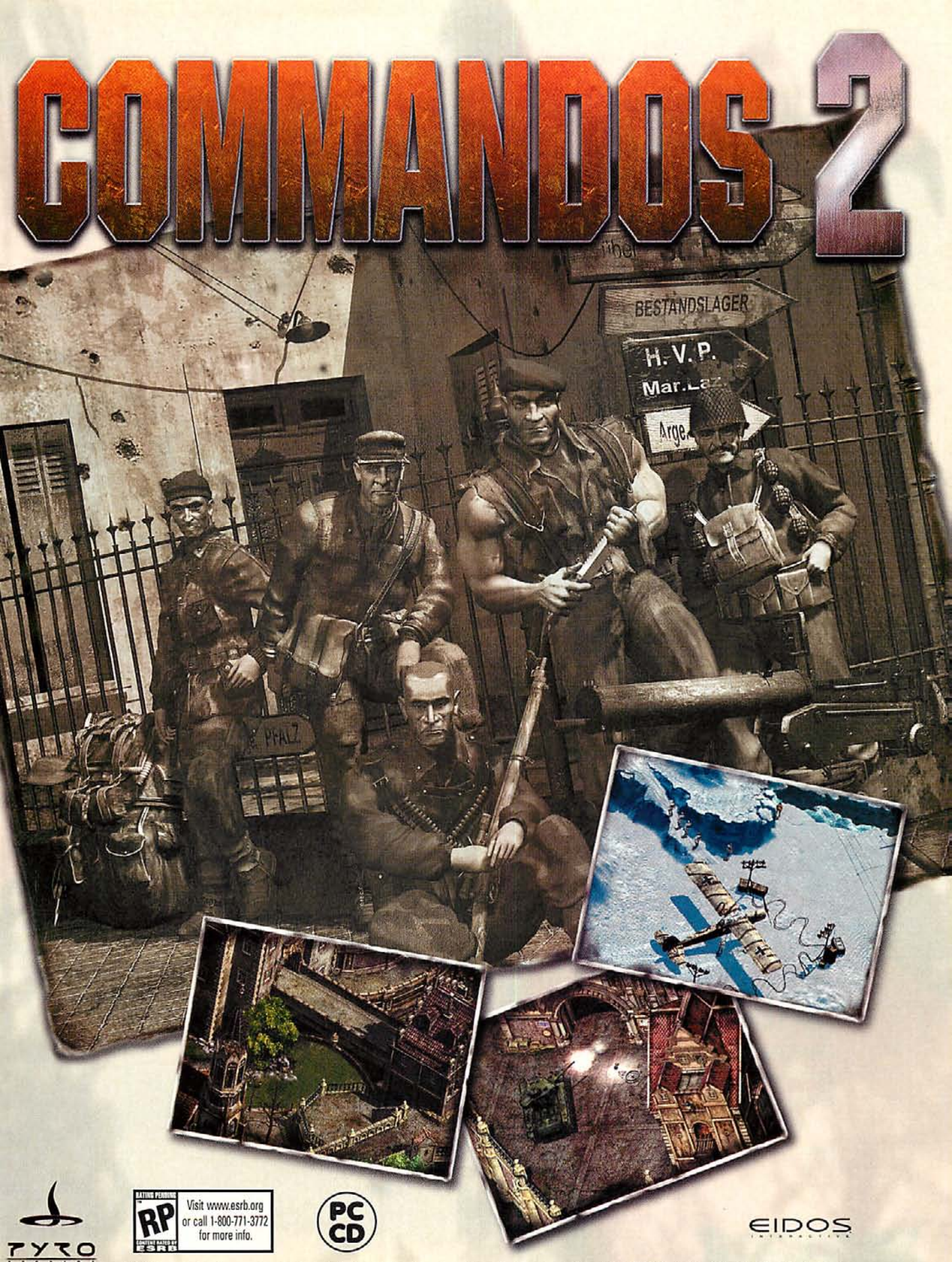
Top Sports/Racing Games

This Month	Game/ Publisher	CGW Rating
1	**Need For Speed: Porsche Unleashed** Electronic Arts	4.5
2	**FIFA 2000** EA Sports	4.5
3	**NHL 2000** EA Sports	3
4	**Motocross Madness 2** Microsoft	4.5
5	**Midtown Madness** Microsoft	4

Top Strategy/War Games

This Month	Game/ Publisher	CGW Rating
1	**Age of Empires II: Age of Kings** Microsoft	5
2	**StarCraft: Brood War** Havas	5
3	**The Sims** Maxis	5
4	**Homeworld** Havas	4.5
5	**Sid Meier's Alpha Centauri** Firaxis	5

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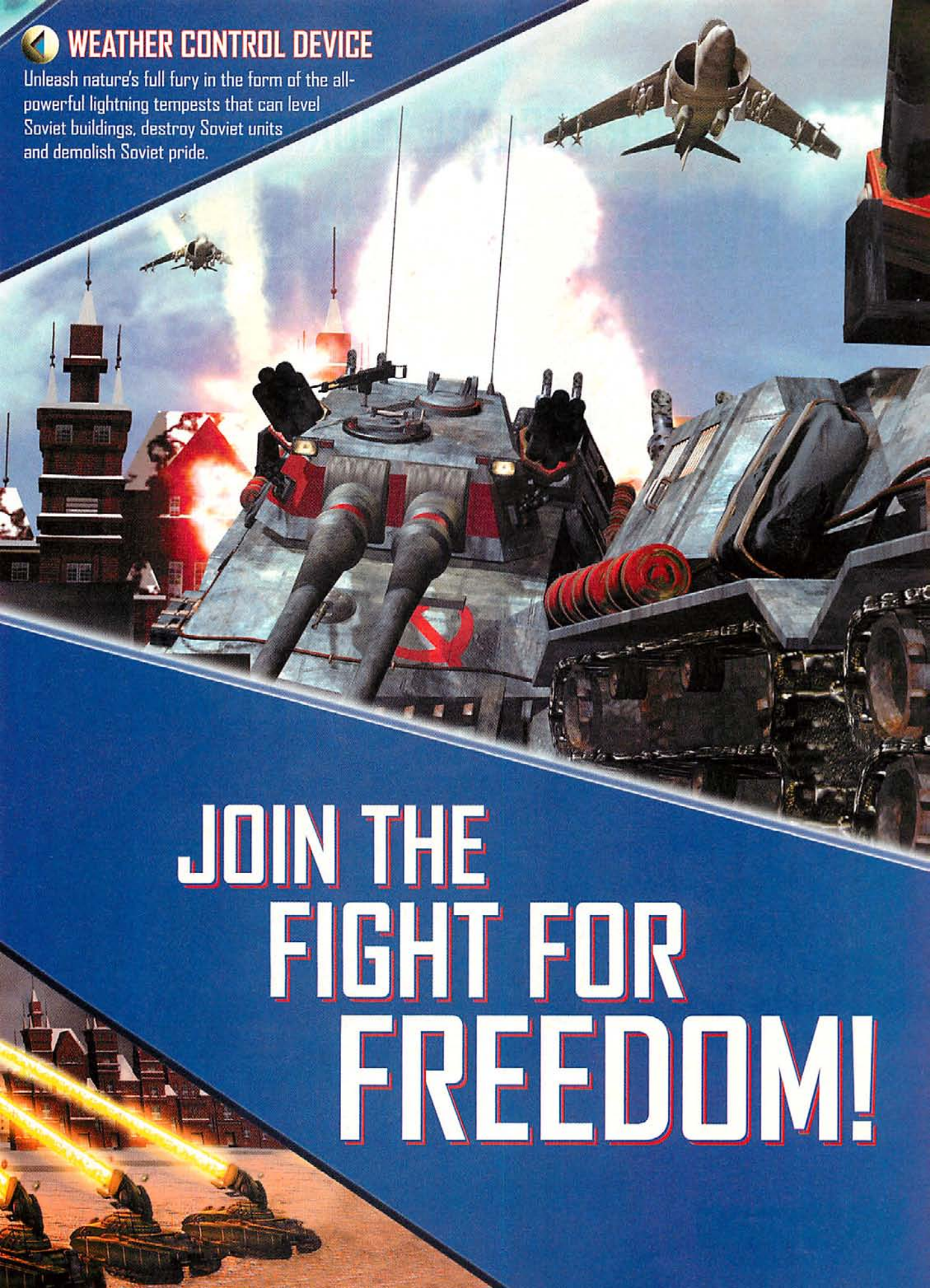


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ESCAPE FROM MONKEY ISLAND
GENRE: Adventure • RELEASE DATE: Q3 00
PUBLISHER: LucasArts
DEVELOPER: LucasArts
CONTACT: www.lucasarts.com

DOUBLE DECAF FRAPPE, GUYBRUSH? Guybrush Threepwood battles the evils of gentrification in ESCAPE FROM MONKEY ISLAND.

Escape From Monkey Island

Good news, mateys! One of the world's great action heroes is back. Not Stallone or Schwarzenneger. Those guys are finished, washed up. I'm talking about a cooler hero than those guys ever were. I'm talking about Threepwood—Guybrush Threepwood. Yes, the legendary hero of three of the best adventure games ever made, LucasArts' classic MONKEY ISLAND games, is back for more—and this time, he's in full 3D.

When LucasArts announced ESCAPE FROM MONKEY ISLAND earlier this year, it came as more than a pleasant surprise to many gamers; it was a downright shock. Wasn't LucasArts' previous adventure game—the stupendous GRIM FANDANGO—a sales fiasco? Wasn't this the final proof that the adventure game genre was (as we know-it-all games journalists have been saying) dead?

This was *my* big question when I went to LucasArts to see the game, and when I asked it, the room filled with groans and laughter.

"You owe me five bucks," said co-producer Mike Stemmle to his partner, Sean Clark.

I guess I had it coming. The fact is, LucasArts adventure games have always occupied a universe of their own—far removed from the MYSTs, the GABRIEL KNIGHTS, the TEMUJINS. And while the rest of the genre has slowly collapsed under the weight of its own mediocrity, LucasArts has quietly gone ahead and produced one great game after another—garnering a world-wide fan base that keeps buying the games, no matter what the pundits say (though GRIM FANDANGO really didn't sell as well as it should have).



WHERE'S THE CANNIBAL HEAD? Remember getting lost in the cave in MONKEY ISLAND? Get ready to get lost again, this time in 3D.

So, yeah, the adventure game genre may be dead, but Guybrush Threepwood, like all great heroes, lives on. Let's see what he's up to this time...

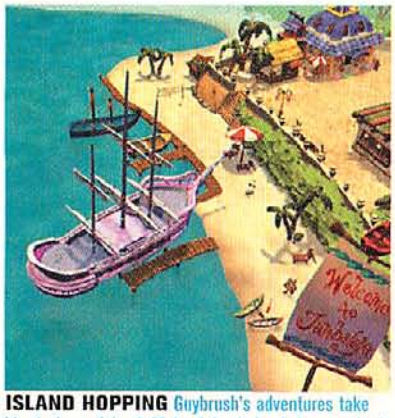
Who Is Charles L. Charles?

Here's the basic setup: Doofus pirate Guybrush Threepwood

Guybrush Threepwood is alive and well—and now in 3D! by Jeff Green

and his true love Elaine Marley, married at the end of the previous game (1997's CURSE OF MONKEY ISLAND), are returning to Melee Island from their honeymoon as ESCAPE opens. Elaine has been gone for so long, however, that she has been declared dead, her mansion is slated for demolition, and the island is on the verge of an election to have her replaced as governor. One of the main candidates: the foppish Charles L. Charles, a man with an uncanny resemblance to a certain ghost pirate of games' past.

To clear up the problem of Elaine's greatly exaggerated death, Guybrush must travel to Lucre Island, where the game's main plot kicks in. It appears that one Ozzie Mandrill, an evil Australian land developer, has launched a sinister scheme to gentrify the entire Tri-Island area, complete with such monstrosities as a Starbuccaneers, Planet Threepwood, and a microgrogery. Can Guybrush stop the evil entrepreneur from turning the islands into a tacky tourist magnet? What is The Ultimate Insult, and why are both Mandrill and Charles L. Charles after it? And whatever happened to all the monkeys on Monkey island, anyway? These mysteries and more will keep you occupied (and laughing) throughout the three-act story.



ISLAND HOPPING Guybrush's adventures take him to Lucre Island, Melee Island, Jambalaya, and, of course, Monkey Island.

The big news about ESCAPE FROM MONKEY ISLAND is that the series is making the transition from 2D to 3D, using a modified version of the GRIM FANDANGO engine. Those worried that the switch to 3D will sacrifice the series' colorful, cartoony feel should fear not: The team hears you. According to Stemmle and Clark, the team's artists spent four months sketching the game's locations and characters on paper (real paper) before any artwork was done on computer—specifically to ensure that that "cartoon look" (bright colors, rounded edges, slightly-distorted camera angles) made the transition intact.

If you're concerned that the 3D will drain the game's characters of personality—turning the skinny, loopy Guybrush into a bulky, blank-eyed QUAKE marine, for example—again, fear not. Along with using an improved animation system that appears much smoother than in GRIM FANDANGO, the artists have also heavily ramped up the polygon count, with each character comprising roughly 1,100-1600 polygons (compared to the roughly 300-400 polygons for Manny Calavera and the other characters in GRIM). If that means nothing to you, just know that you are not being betrayed. Yes, they're polygonal now, but Guybrush, Elaine, LeChuck (whoops—I mean Charles), and the rest will be the same loveable gang of idiots we've known for 10 years now.

The Second Biggest Monkey Head

Gameplay will remain similar to the previous games with some of GRIM's 3D innovations. (And, no, we don't mean platform jumping—this is a real adventure game.) You'll maneuver Guybrush the same way you did Manny, with a keyboard (or controller), and his head will swivel and point to items of interest. The user interface has been completely revamped, with Manny's open overcoat traded in for a rotating, 3D inventory system.

GROG NAZI The highlight of the game, as always, is going to be Threepwood's encounters with the game's bevy of buffoons.



But, really, it's all about the jokes. Like the *Airplane!* or *Austin Powers* movies, the MONKEY ISLAND games have always been exercises in absurdity, never taking themselves too seriously. The games never miss an opportunity to tell a joke, no matter how ridiculous, no matter how irrelevant to the story. The long, branching dialogue trees (over 9,000 spoken lines in this game) are as much about joke-telling as they are puzzle-solving. The puzzles, too, are played for laughs—and yet they always manage to make logical sense.

Co-producers Stemmle and Clark know something about joke telling—their previous adventure game for LucasArts was the classic SAM AND MAX HIT THE ROAD, one of the funniest games ever made. The designers are reaching back to the first game for some nice cameos for longtime fans, including Herman Toothrot and original "crew members" Carla the Swordmaster and Otis—and we'll even get to revisit some of the first game's locations, like the SCUMM bar.

So though it's a brave new 3D world for Guybrush Threepwood, his legions of fans should feel right at home in ESCAPE FROM MONKEY ISLAND. It's the best news for adventure game fans in years. CGW

LOONY TOONS The design team storyboarded all the sets on paper first to ensure the game stayed true to its cartoony roots.

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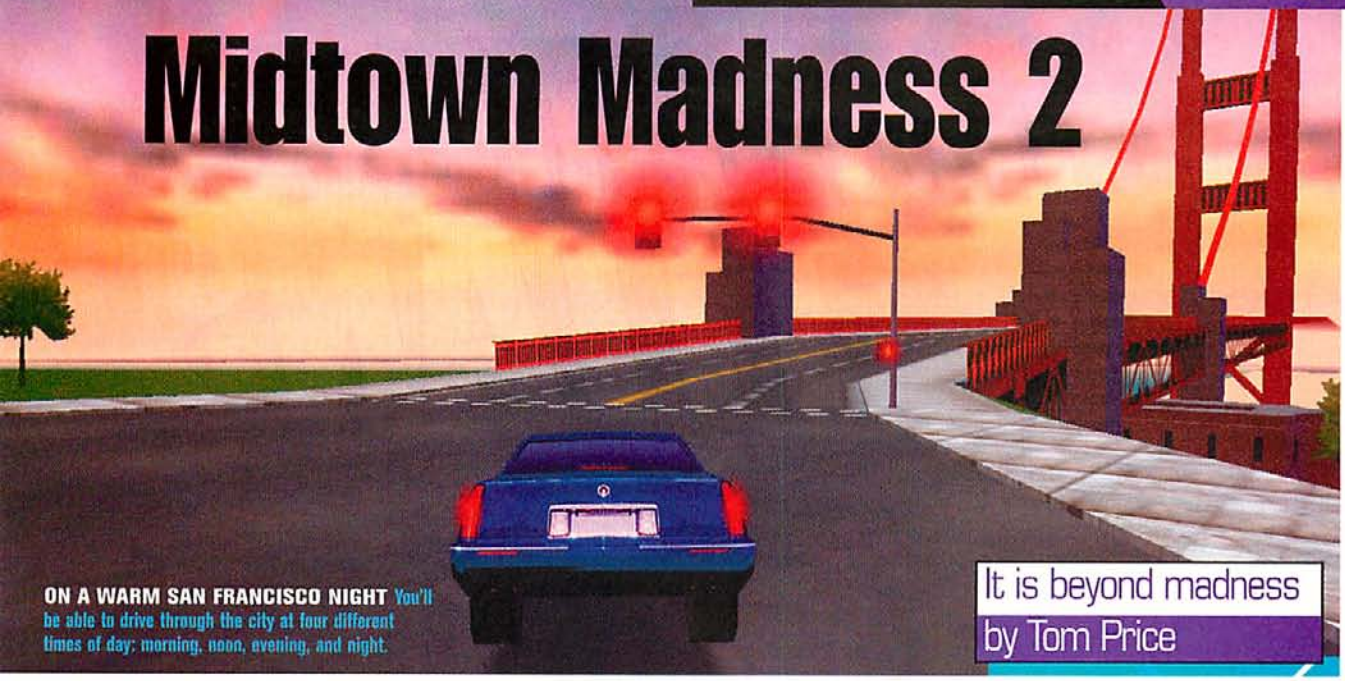
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Midtown Madness 2



ON A WARM SAN FRANCISCO NIGHT You'll be able to drive through the city at four different times of day: morning, noon, evening, and night.

It is beyond madness

by Tom Price

Blame it on Steve McQueen. Our national obsession with fast cars careening around city streets at stomach-churning speeds, that is. McQueen's movie *Bullitt* began the car-chase craze that lives on to this day in movies like *Gone in 60 Seconds*, plus computer and videogames like DRIVER, CARMAGEDDON, and CRAZY TAXI. Microsoft looks to inject some more of that white-knuckle intensity into its burgeoning MADNESS franchise with MIDTOWN.

Last year's MIDTOWN MADNESS allowed us to have about as much fun with an arcade racer as we're willing to admit. It offered a lot more than your typical racing experience, thanks to a variety of good single- and multiplayer modes, and a scaled-down but accurate map of Chicago to tool around in.

This time around, you'll have two cities to explore, San Francisco and London. In single-player mode, you'll have all the same options as in MM1—including Blitz, Checkpoint, and Circuit race modes, plus a stunt-driving campaign in S.F. and a CRAZY TAXI-esque romp through London. Multiplayer modes remain relatively unchanged feature-wise, but have undergone significant optimization improvements.

MIDTOWN MADNESS 2
GENRE: Driving • RELEASE DATE: Q4 00
PUBLISHER: Microsoft
DEVELOPER: Angel Studios
CONTACT: www.angelstudios.com/midtown2.html

The two new city maps are presented in much the same way the Chicago map was in the first MIDTOWN. They are geographically correct, but scaled down and simplified to a great extent. Still, if you are familiar with either of the cities, you should have no trouble finding all of your favorite landmarks. I've never been to London, so I can't really comment on the accuracy of that city's representation in the game, but San Fran is like my own backyard. For the most part, the basic layout of the city is pretty faithful, with a lot of the western part of the city—including Golden Gate Park—compressed down. Most of the landmarks you would expect to see (Golden Gate Bridge, Coit Tower, Transamerica Pyramid, etc.) are nicely rendered and easy to find. The only glaring omission is Pac Bell Park, the new home of the Giants.

Control-wise, the overall feel is still one of arcadey forgiveness—a game meant more for a gamepad than a racing wheel. But the physics engine has been upgraded to a certain degree. Cars can now drive on two wheels or flip over completely. Damage modeling has been improved, with higher-res damage textures and breakaway car parts.



GATECRASHER Not the recommended way to meet the Queen.



THANK GOD IT'S A RENTAL Now you can do what every San Francisco driver has always wanted to do: Take California Street at 80 MPH.

As for cars, a lot of your favorites from the first game will be back, including the Panoz roadster, the city bus, and the new Beetle. This year's new models include Mini Coopers, double-decker buses, and Jaguars. More cars and paintjobs are unlocked as you progress through the game.

All told, MIDTOWN MADNESS 2 looks to be at least as fun as its predecessor, if not a lot more. Considering how much we liked the first game, MM2 should be even better than actually ramming your car into that cell-phone-yakking-dot-commer-in-a-land-yacht crawling down Market Street. CGW

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Anne McCaffrey's Freedom: First Resistance

Red Storm gets up close and third-personal by Robert Coffey

Oh God, we're fighting alien invaders again. Oh God, Red Storm is trying to break out of the RAINBOW SIX mold again.

Oh God, it's another third-person action/adventure game with another plucky heroine. Again.

So, God, why should we care about the clumsily-titled ANNE MCCAFFREY'S FREEDOM: FIRST RESISTANCE? Maybe because this time, for the first time, Red Storm may be on the right track as it tries to prove it's not a one-trick-pony developer.

Ragtag Bland?

At first glance, FIRST RESISTANCE looks like every other spiffy 3D TOMB RAIDER wannabe. What makes it different is its character, *five* characters actually, all with involved backstories and all of which can be controlled by the player. Though the focus of the game is squarely centered on Angel Sanchez—the leader of a small cell of human freedom-fighters struggling to overthrow their alien enslavers—the mission-based, puzzle-driven nature of the gameplay will dictate that you take other characters along in order to succeed. Every character has a specialty: For Angel, it's firearms; for lumbering Jimmy, it's sheer brute strength; for crafty Leo, it's his hacking ability, and so on. While you can't command your little squad *per se*, you can direct them to follow you, or with a simple key-press, you can take control of them directly.

Once you control a character, your former avatar assumes a defensive posture, so you won't have to worry about babysitting him/her in case bad guys come calling. While it's tempting to keep your group together, you'll need to separate in order to solve many of the puzzles. For instance, halfway through the game Jimmy will need to rescue his brother, inconveniently hiding behind an electronically locked door. You'll need to have Leo hack into the electrical system while Angel flips a remote switch, so that Jimmy can seize this small window of opportunity to dart through the door.

ANNE MCCAFFREY'S FREEDOM: FIRST RESISTANCE
GENRE: Action/Adventure • RELEASE DATE: Q4 00
PUBLISHER: Red Storm Entertainment
DEVELOPER: Red Storm Entertainment
CONTACT: www.redstorm.com

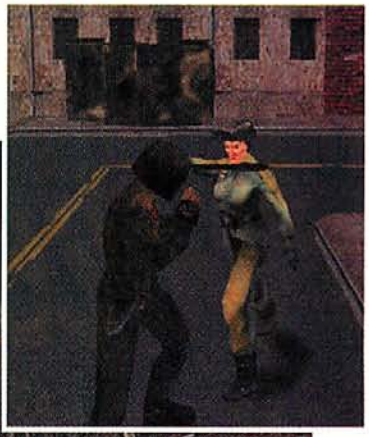
Such multi-part puzzles are indicative of FIRST RESISTANCE's more thoughtful gameplay focus. While there will be gunplay and hand-to-hand combat, you'll spend more time sneaking past the much stronger aliens, throwing pebbles to distract them with sound, hiding in shadows to avoid being seen, and shutting doors behind you so they don't realize you've entered their safehouses. Mindless running and gunning will leave you run over and gunned down.

Concessions for Anne Fans

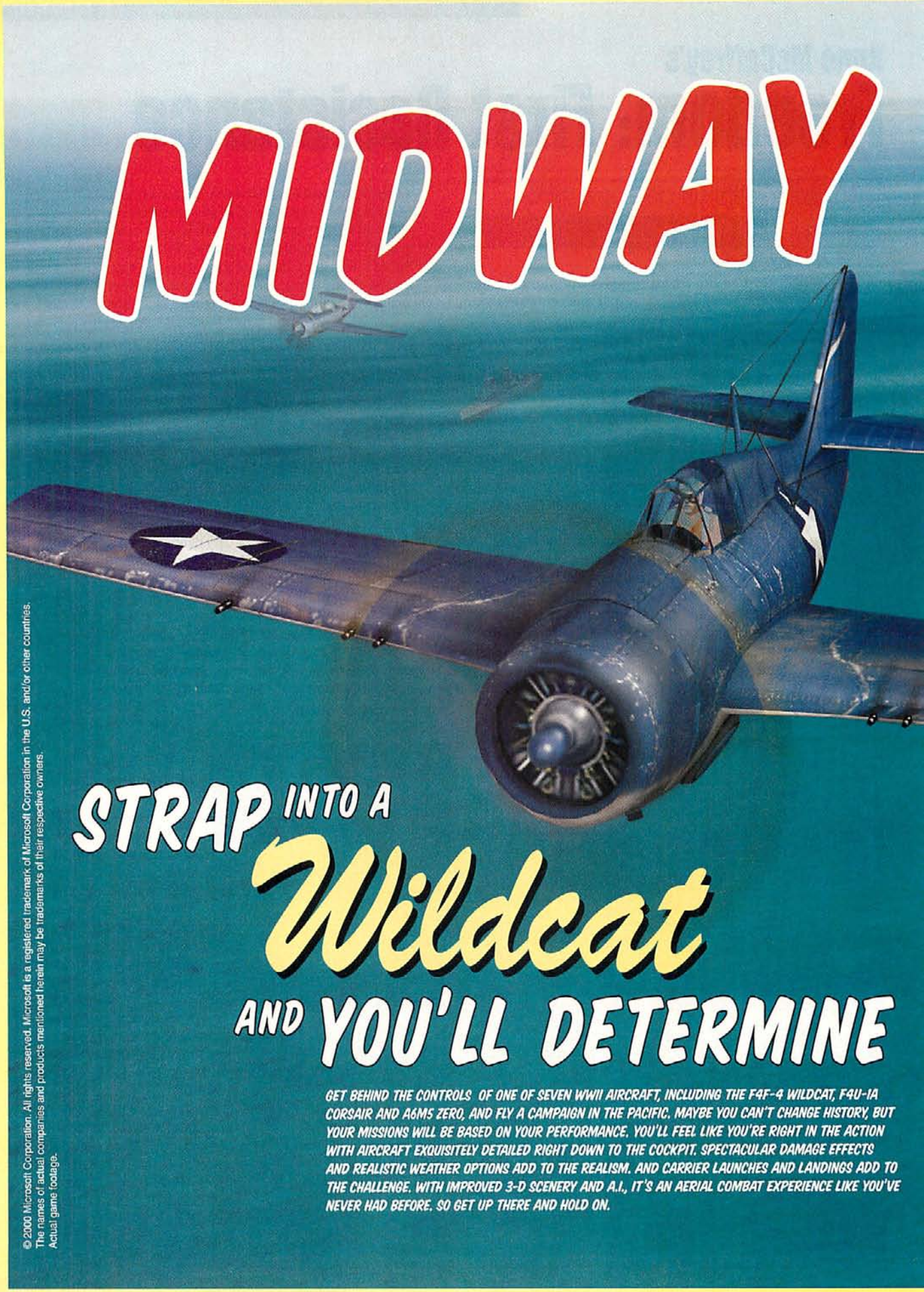
Red Storm is hoping that FIRST RESISTANCE will reach a broader, more casual audience, so they're wisely devoting a lot of time to story and character—don't want to piss off the Anne McCaffrey fans by shortchanging the characters. If there's a potential misstep in their approach, however, it'll likely be the combat. Gamers will have relatively little control in the melee grappling, with fighting moves dictated by how long the attack button is held down, and the range between your current avatar and their attacker. This is all well and good for newbies, but I can't help but think that the more experienced gamers who play at higher difficulty levels would want the option of determining whether and when they unleash that roundhouse kick, or let loose with an uppercut.

Still, FIRST RESISTANCE is promising, even at this early alpha stage. Will it escape the ignominy or irrelevance suffered by Red Storm's other, "branch-out" games (FORCE 21, SHADOW WATCH, or DOMINANT SPECIES)? We'll know this Fall when it hits store shelves. CGW

WHEN GIRLS ATTACK Angel dukes it out with an alien sympathizer.



MEAN STREETS The game environments are huge, and many – like the downtown area here – will be revisited through the course of the game and reflect the increasing destruction of the Catteni aliens.


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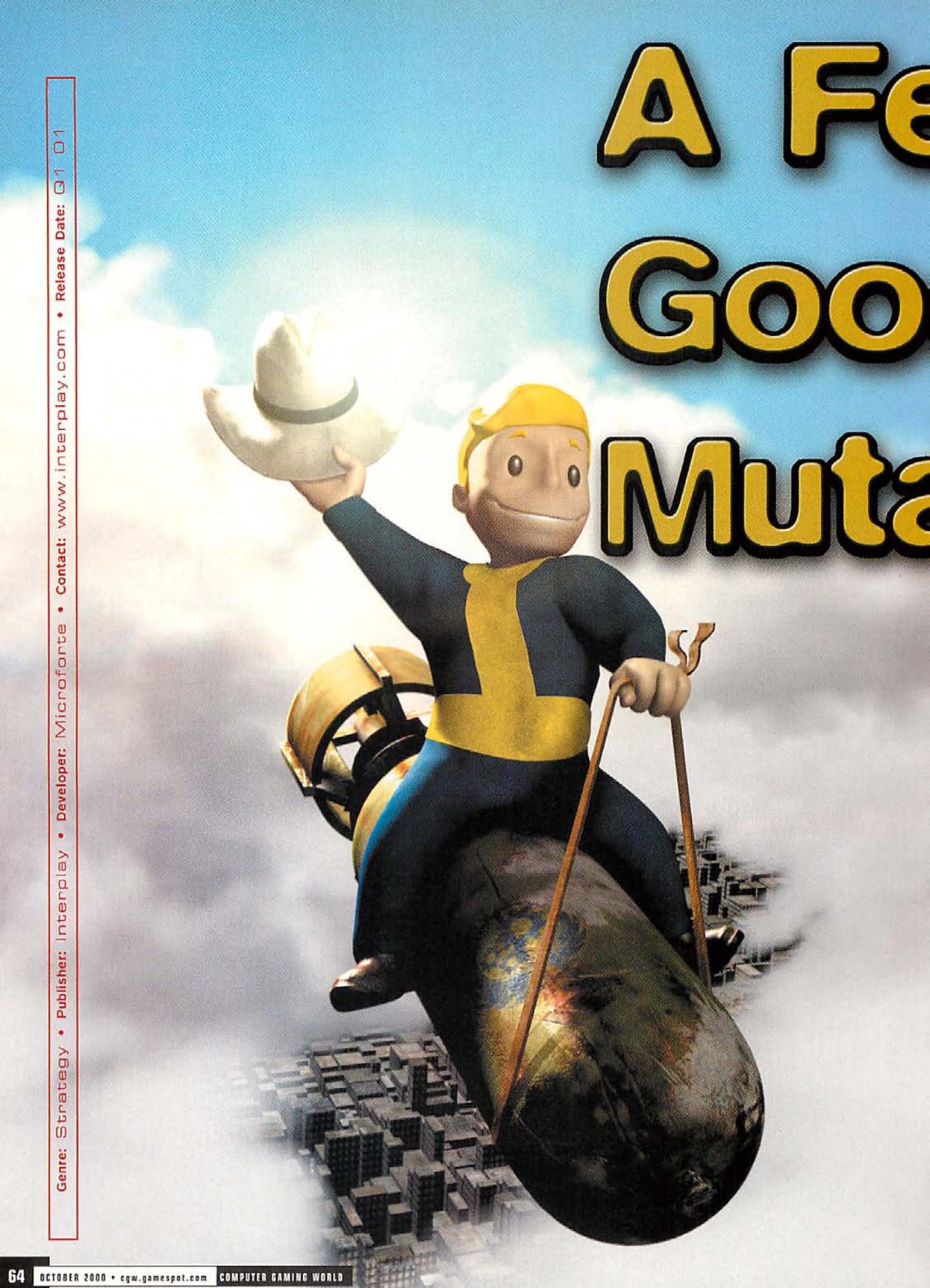
THE DARK KNIGHTS TOYED WITH THEIR BLOODY TROPHIES BEFORE DISGARDING THEM LIKE THE REST



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KINGDOM UNDER FIRE

A Fe
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Genre: Strategy • Publisher: Interplay • Developer: Microforte • Contact: www.interplay.com • Release Date: Q1 01

ew Welcome to the America of tomorrow! Try not to die!

by Robert Coffey

d, Hideously ted Men

Atomic holocausts have a way of ruining everyone's day. No one—with the possible exception of the ghouls, mutants, and bands of murdering scum—is having a very good time in the post-nuclear America of Interplay's FALLOUT TACTICS.

Living in a wasteland aglow with persistent radiation, humankind has been all but wiped out, reduced to a smattering of decrepit shantytowns populated by desperate survivors. With the human species about three baby steps from the edge of oblivion, the cult of the heavily-armed known as the Brotherhood of Steel works to keep the remnants of humanity safe.

Do you have what it takes to survive the tortuous rigors of this hard new world? Are you man enough to succeed as a member of the Brotherhood?

Can You Go Home Again?

Set in same horrific retro-future of Interplay's great FALLOUT role-playing games, FALLOUT TACTICS: BROTHERHOOD OF STEEL strips away most of the interactive character and story elements to focus on the tense heavy-weapons combat. The game takes place sometime between the storylines of the two RPGs, casting the player as a fresh initiate into the gritty Brotherhood of Steel. A small band of Brothers—cut off from the main body after chasing the Super Mutants out of what's left of the country—is beginning the long journey home. In an attempt to supplement their numbers, they begin recruiting from local villages. That's where you come in.

Your recruit is a fresh character to whom you assign statistic points (in familiar categories like luck, endurance, and strength), character perks, and skills. While your basic statistics won't change over the course of the game, the Tag Skills you choose at the beginning of the game will—so you'll need to be sure to pick skills that suit your style of play. Are you going to be a big bruiser blasting gigantic guns? Then tag your Big Guns skill and enjoy an immediate 20% bonus when using the larger weapons. Want to wield a plasma gun? Be sure to tag Energy Weapons. As you gain experience, you can improve upon and add new skills.

As in FALLOUT, you'll also have the option of picking Perks for your character. The double-edged sword of character creation, perks will give you playing

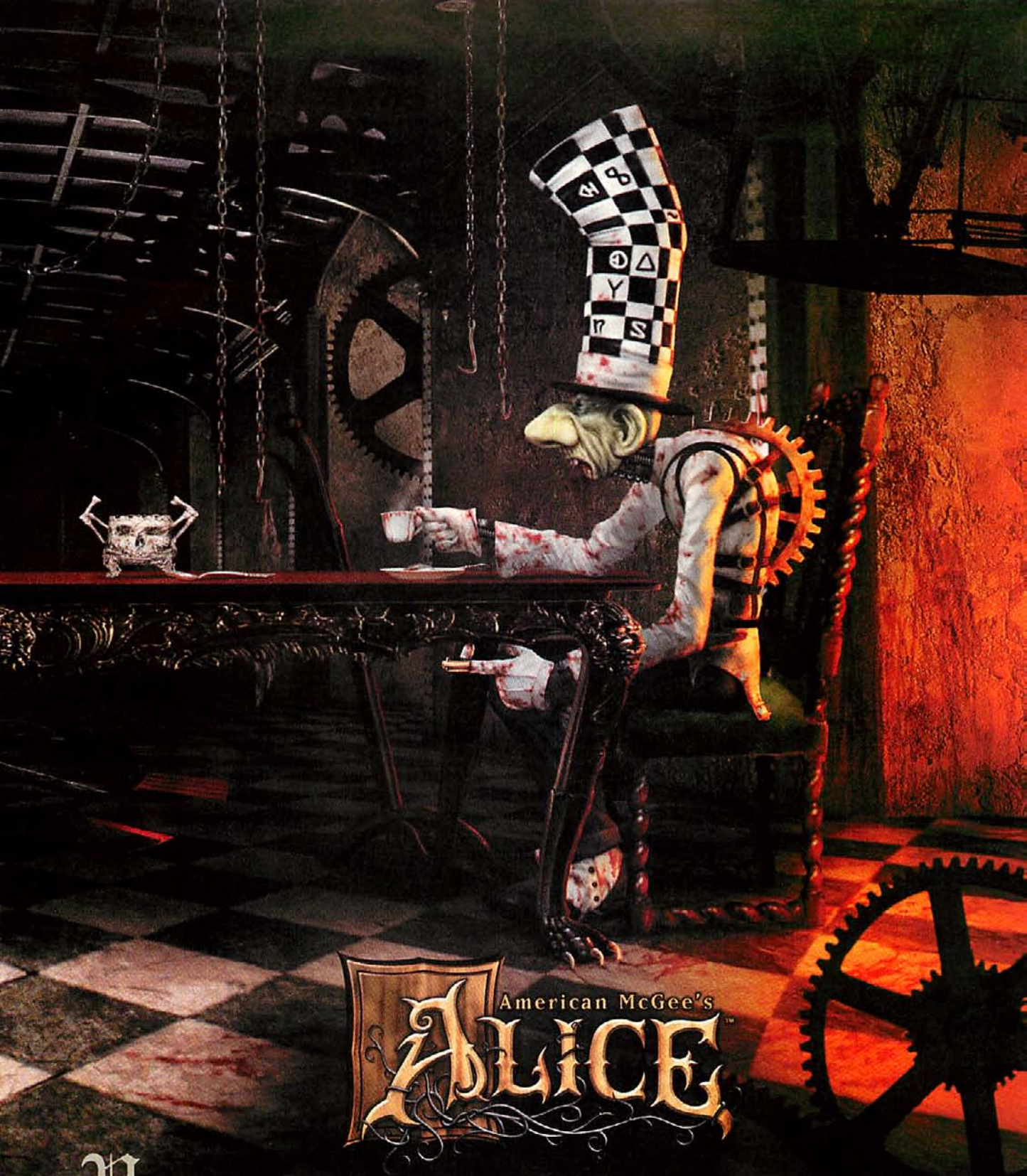


CHARACTER QUIRKS

A slew of Perks from which to choose will allow you to customize your entire squad, not just your primary character.



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You emerge from the rabbit hole to a decaying and sinister Wonderland. With toys as weapons, you must destroy the evil Queen of Hearts to survive. Do you have what it takes to defeat her sadistic minions and outwit her mind-numbing puzzles? Conceived and designed by American McGee, lead level designer for Quake® and Quake II™, this 3rd person action/adventure combines lethal shooter gameplay with fluid character animation. Using an enhanced version of the Quake III Arena™ engine, explore the most detailed 3D action environments yet created. Are you ready for this next chapter of Alice?

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OH THE HUMANITY! Vibrant cut-scenes like this one set up the story of how your Brotherhood of Steel unit was lost in the wasteland for several years.

bonuses, but at the expense of something else. So, while Fast Shot means you'll use fewer action points to get your attacks off, you won't get the luxury of a targeted shot. Again, with experience comes the option for new perks, and with characters maxing out at around level 15 or 20, you'll get lots of opportunity for further character customization.

All of this should be familiar to veterans of the FALLOUT games, right down to the happy-go-lucky Bob's Big Boy-style spokesman (and *CGW* cover model), PIP Boy. But with new perks and traits, you can expect a nice, hefty manual to make sure all your decisions are informed ones.







RADIATION BURNS Mammoth super mutants and cadaverous ghouls are just a couple of the enemies you'll have to battle as you make your way home.

Route 666

Once you create your character, the game proper begins. As part of the Brotherhood, you'll fight your way across the blighted landscape via a large world map, battling ghouls, mutants, and evil humans in roughly 25 missions, along with a few random encounters. In between missions, you'll be able to move about a Brotherhood bunker, bartering for better weapons, picking and equipping your squad, and talking with NPCs to flesh out the six-chapter story.

Again, FALLOUT veterans should be pretty familiar with the combat system, though there have been some significant changes. The most obvious is in scale—unlike the smaller, more confined battles of the RPGs, FALLOUT TACTICS takes place on larger maps with more combatants. Your squad will be composed of two to six members, including your primary character as well as other Brotherhood members you selected and equipped prior to the mission. Your NPC teammates are chosen from a pool of around 30 and are fully-fledged characters, complete with skills, perks, and so on. While you don't create these characters, you will be able to shape them as they gain experience from successful battles, guiding their skill development and choosing new skills and perks. Unlike your primary character, these guys can die in a battle without your losing. But with the limited pool and amount of time and development you'll invest in them, you're going to want to keep them around as long as possible.

Unlike previous FALLOUT games, you'll actually be able to control the NPCs fighting alongside you; in fact, skillfully deploying your forces will be absolutely essential for success. You'll determine if, when, and where they shoot, if they try for the harder and potentially more damaging targeted shot, or if they go for the higher percentage (if less brutal) straight shot. You'll have total control, ordering your sharpshooter to duck behind cover while your heavy-weapons guy flushes enemies out of a crumbling building; directing your hand-to-hand guy to quietly slit the throats of unsuspecting sentries; or just ordering your squad to let bullets fly when confronted by an enemy on the vast, coverless expanse of the wasteland or in an enormous underground cavern.

Tick, Tick, Tick...

Perhaps the biggest change to the venerable FALLOUT system is in the combat. The classic turn-based model is still in place, allowing for painstaking micro-management where every step and shot is methodically dictated. It worked great in FALLOUT, and it still works in the early build of TACTICS we've been fiddling with.

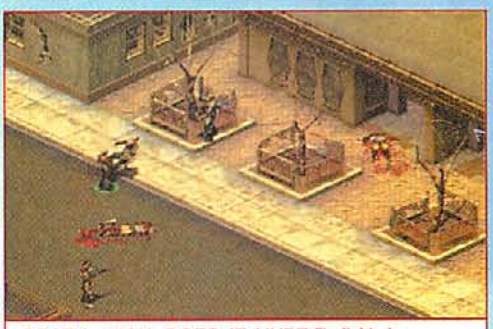
But this time around, gamers will have a second combat option: Continuous Turn-Based (CTB). Basically, CTB is a sort of phased turn system based on the action-point-ruled combat of the turn-based system. Instead of ticking off discrete action points with every action as in turn-based, CTB depletes a constantly-regenerating action bar reflecting available action points. This means that a character can stay in almost constant motion, as long as his action bar is never depleted. However, you'll still have to take care in managing action points in order to ensure your characters have enough time and energy to take their shots or drop behind cover.

Frankly, we were skeptical about how well this would work—games like X-COM and JAGGED ALLIANCE thrived in a classic turn-based format. However, after a few multiplayer contests, we found that CTB introduced a ticking bomb flavor to the action, with battles blossoming into tense attack and counterattack duels as each player walked the time-management tightrope, hoping to catch the other without enough time left to respond to a hit-and-run attack. The option of combat styles will be available in both single- and multiplayer, though you'll have to select one or the other before a mission, since you won't be able to switch on the fly.

Other significant game changes include new weapons, including chemical weapons and a lot of vicious melee hardware. (What better way to underscore a brutal existence than in a punishing battle with rusty knives?) For the first time, vehicles will be available in the FALLOUT world. Current plans include three or four different tactical vehicles, useable for movement, combat (some will come equipped with guns while others will let passengers take shots), and item storage.



HITCHING A RIDE For the first time in the FALLOUT universe, vehicles will be useable. Here, a squaddie breaks into a Hummer while the rest of the unit provides cover.



DEATH—MAN, DOES IT HURT Firefights in TACTICS will be brutal affairs, punctuated by severed limbs, twisting corpses, and the constant sound of gunfire and anguished screams.

The graphics have already been sharpened up, but haven't lost any of that signature FALLOUT flavor—a critical shot to the head will blow a good chunk out of the back of a character's skull before they drop to the ground.

We confess: When we first saw this game at E3, we wondered, "Why?" After spending more time with the game, we unbegrudgingly have to admit that Microforte and Interplay may be on to something—with a robust multiplayer mode (you can even pick Deathclaws and ghouls for your squad), deep RPG elements, and a personality all its own, FALLOUT TACTICS could capture that chronically obsessive part of our brains that had us playing X-COM for months and months and months. We'll let you know if they've pulled it off when the game ships early next year. CGW



HOUSES OF THE UNHOLY Whether exploring a creepy church or seizing control of a derelict building, the updated graphics and sharp character models in FALLOUT TACTICS help create an immense sense of dread and constant threat.





WARNING:

Contents May Be Volatile

Keep out of reach of children

OUR GAME WILL

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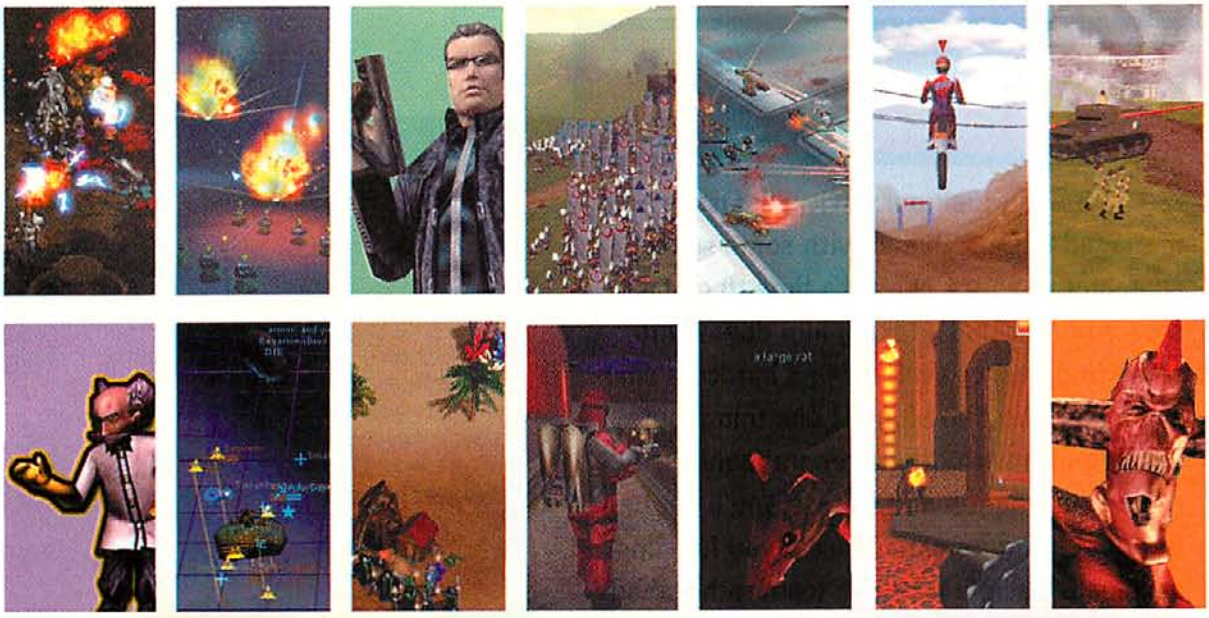
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DIABLO II

by Mark Asher and Thierry Nguyen

So you took our advice last issue and managed to beat Diablo with some spiffy character of yours. Now, it's time to go farther, whether that's taking him down with some buddies, or even using a hardcore character. Fighting him alone is one thing, but fighting him with other gamers requires more coordination and finesse. You'll get better loot and more experience if you function as a lean, disciplined strike team rather than a bunch of yahoos who agree to not fight each other.

RESOURCEFUL NECROMANCY

The Necromancer and the Sorceress make for a powerful boss-killer combo. The Sorceress can use Static Field to quickly knock off about two-thirds of an enemy's hitpoints, and the Necromancer can follow up with an Amplify Damage Curse. The remaining third of life combined with the additional damage translates into easy deathblows from other party members or the Necromancer's cronies. With a full party, you can pretty much dispatch of any unique monster with ease.



SILENCE OF THE COWS

A recent *CGW* foray into the Secret Cow Level yielded a perfect example of the teamwork, bravado, and skill initiative that makes for a successful party.

1. First off, we just ran into the portal, with little regard for what lurked behind the other side. The malicious Hell Bovine Horde surrounded both of us, and proceeded to pummel the hell out of each of us simultaneously.

2. Pissed and humiliated, we ran back into the fray, but decided to actually strategize this time. Scooterion the Paladin had quite an Aura of Holy Freeze; it was able to freeze things up to ten yards away. Lil_Cindy the Amazon dealt great damage, but from a distance. So, Scooterion activated his Holy Freeze to keep the Hell Bovine Horde at bay, while Lil_Cindy safely plugged at them with her arrows.

3. Moments later, the number of dead Hell Bovines was outnumbered only by the gold, gems, and various loot they left behind. We didn't even noticed the Cow King coming by; he was frozen and slaughtered by a slew of arrows, just like the others.



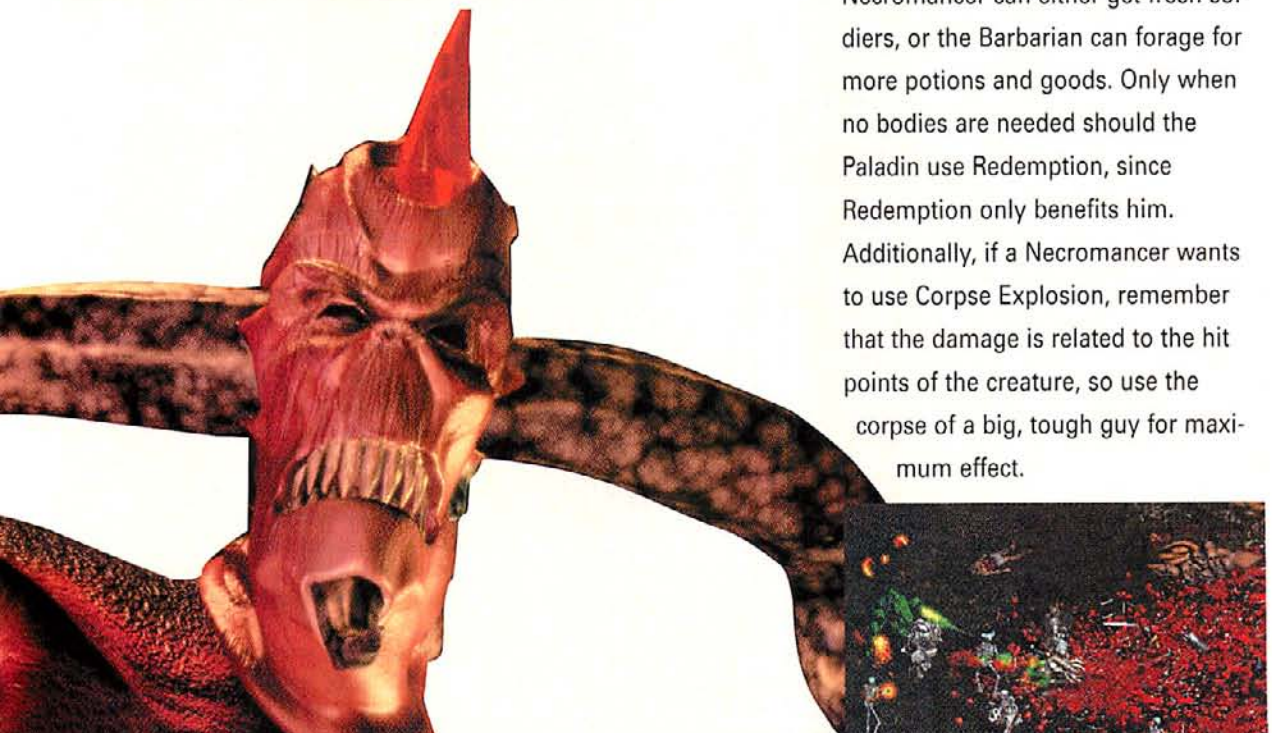
SILENCE OF THE COWS

■■■ The Barbarian is typically a simple Tank: He runs up to the frontline and both dishes out and absorbs damage. This is the easiest way to play him. But, he can also make a great defender for your support characters (Sorceresses, Necromancers, and Amazons). Unlike the Paladin, you can stack Defensive Warcries; the best way to stack them is the following order: Battle Commands, Battle Orders, and then Shout. You'll be able to boost all of your party's ability tremendously with that order. Also, don't neglect Leap. If some undead goons manage to close in on your buddies, nothing helps faster than Leaping into the fray and thumping them left and right. Develop your Leap skill in order to become a quick-response defense mechanism.



RATIONING THE DEAD

■■■ Necromancers, Barbarians, and later on, Paladins, will all compete for the dead. Necromancers will need corpses for either Corpse Explosion or Summoning various skeletons; Barbarians will need the bodies for Find Potion, and Paladins may want to use Redemption. Beforehand, either work out some sort of rotation order for every encounter (i.e., Necromancer gets the first batch, then Barbarian, then back to the Necromancer), or just ask. Whatever you do, be organized enough to the point where the Necromancer can either get fresh soldiers, or the Barbarian can forage for more potions and goods. Only when no bodies are needed should the Paladin use Redemption, since Redemption only benefits him. Additionally, if a Necromancer wants to use Corpse Explosion, remember that the damage is related to the hit points of the creature, so use the corpse of a big, tough guy for maximum effect.



GRAB IT

■■■ Sorceresses should be designated as looters. Why? Telekinesis. Using only a few mana at a time, the Sorceress can stop in one place, and snatch all the goods, rather than run around like a beheaded chicken. The dynamics of who gets what can be worked out later, but with the Sorceress in charge of snagging stuff, everyone can focus on either exploring or finishing off any living goons. Also, Sorceresses can use Telekinesis to stun enemies from a distance, allowing the rest of the party to close in for the kill.



DIABLO II

HARDEST OF THE HARDCORE

You've defanged Andriel, exterminated Duriel, exorcised Mephisto, and even dropped the hammer on the Big D himself. You're feeling pretty good about yourself? Bah. You haven't even begun to play DIABLO 2 until you've played on hardcore mode. It's a brand new game.

Hardcore mode becomes available after you've successfully played through the entire game. You can play with either an "open" character or a "realm" character, depending on which mode you played to finish the game. You create a new hardcore character, and you only get one crack at finishing the game. If your character dies even once, it's game over. Permanently. You can never play that character again.

Hardcore mode is difficult, nervewracking, frustrating, and...exciting! We've got some timely tips to help you become a real DIABLO 2 player—one of the elite who have completed the game in hardcore mode.

SURVIVAL FIRST

First, you're going to fashion your character for survival rather than maximizing destructive force. Put more points than you might otherwise into Vitality when you gain a level. You need those hitpoints. You'll also want to pad your strength stats as well, so you can wear better armor.

RESISTANCES

Your life bubble will drop dramatically when you become the victim of ranged attacks, and the worst ones are magical attacks—fire, lightning, or poison. Without resistances, these attacks—which often come from off your viewable screen—can kill you before you react. Hold onto items that boost resistances.

KEY HOTKEYS

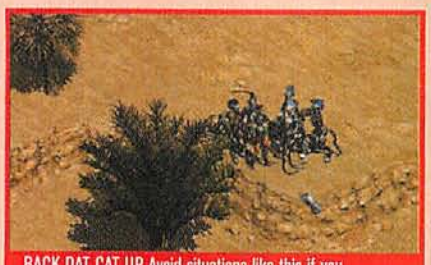
Always keep rejuvenation potions and Town Portal spells hot-keyed. Rejuv potions restore life instantly, unlike healing potions. Use healing potions when you begin to take damage in normal situations. Save your rejuvenation potions for emergencies. You can use the Horadic cube to create rejuvenation potions. Take three mana potions and three health potions of any size, and combine them in the cube to produce one partial rejuvenation potion. Add in a crappy chipped gem, and get a full rejuv potion! Be ready to hit the Town Portal hotkey when things get too intense.



DOES THIS MAKE ME LOOK FAT? Fast hit recovery and lightning resistance make for a nice hardcore survival item.



POINT 'N' KILL Use ranged attacks when possible.



BACK DAT CAT UP Avoid situations like this if you can – cornered and outnumbered.



SHALOM, GOLEM Put points into golem mastery if you're a necromancer (to make him a better target/damage soaker).



AN OLD FRIEND RETURNS Though, if you don't follow my advice, you'll end up like him.

YOUR WORST ENEMY IS...

...You! You've already played through the game once, and now you're playing it again in hardcore mode. You're cruising along, say, in Act 2, a natural-born killing machine. You've killed thousands of creatures by now, and it's easy to relax your guard. DIABLO 2 is a game of hypnotic repetition at times. Thing is, when things go wrong, they go wrong fast! You open a door, step in, and before you know it, you find yourself swarmed and backed into a corner with your life dropping rapidly. You try to get a Town Portal off but you're constantly being hit, and the spell is interrupted. You don't get a second chance. Survive, or it'll be time to think up a name for your new character.

So what's the best way to survive these situations? Avoid them. Creep along. Be wary. Don't rush. Make sure your health bubble is always full, instead of half full. Know what kind of enemies you're likely to encounter and juggle your rings and amulets to get the best resistance to their attacks. Be especially cautious when you're likely to encounter attackers with powerful ranged-attacks, and be respectfully fearful of bosses and mini-bosses.

By the latter stages of Act 2 in hardcore mode, it's a good idea to only play for brief stretches at a time so you can keep mentally sharp. Set small goals, such as completing one leg of a quest or even just finding the Waypoint marker in a given zone; don't rush through the levels. It's easy to be lulled by the constant monster bashing and forget how quickly you can be killed.

CHEATING DEATH

Finally, the ultimate way to cheat death is to cheat, sort of. If you're about to die and you're quick enough, instead of Town Portalling, just hit the ESC key and then select the save and quit option. Do it quickly, before your character is dead, and your hardcore hero will survive to restart in town the next time you play.

GROUND CONTROL

by Tom Price

Soldiers are people too. This becomes quite clear in GROUND CONTROL, where you are denied the ability to simply crank out endless hordes of doomed units and must find a path to victory with a select few of your comrades. You're going to need to help your squads survive—if you want them at your side at the final battle. So establishing a strong defense from various kinds of attacks is an important task in GROUND CONTROL, especially for more vulnerable units like artillery. Here are a few tips on how to defend yourself.

DEATH FROM ABOVE

Attacking airborne units can inflict a lot of damage on your units very quickly, but they are also fairly fragile themselves. Make sure one of your support squads is configured for Anti-Aircraft work, and then set them to guard your artillery or whatever other unit is particularly vulnerable to direct attack. Better yet, bring along some Rocket Terradynes (if you're playing as Crayven) that can target both air and ground units. If you don't have those vehicles available, then bring along some Light Terradynes equipped with deployable anti-air sentries, and set up a net around your main force. Keep in mind that units with less powerful machine-guns usually can target aircraft, while the main guns of the bigger tanks cannot.



INCOMING!

One of the biggest hazards in GROUND CONTROL is artillery. One barrage can decimate your units, and leave the rest in serious need of recharging. The most obvious defense against arty is of course avoidance, but some times you need to get in close and exchange some rounds, raining shells be damned. The Order of the New Dawn has the best defense against enemy artillery (both shell- and rocket-type) in the deployable defender gun carried by Medium Hoverdynes and Scout Bikes. Set one of these next to the unit you wish to defend, and watch it take out all incoming flying ordnance like a frog's tongue taking out flies.

HEAL THYSELF

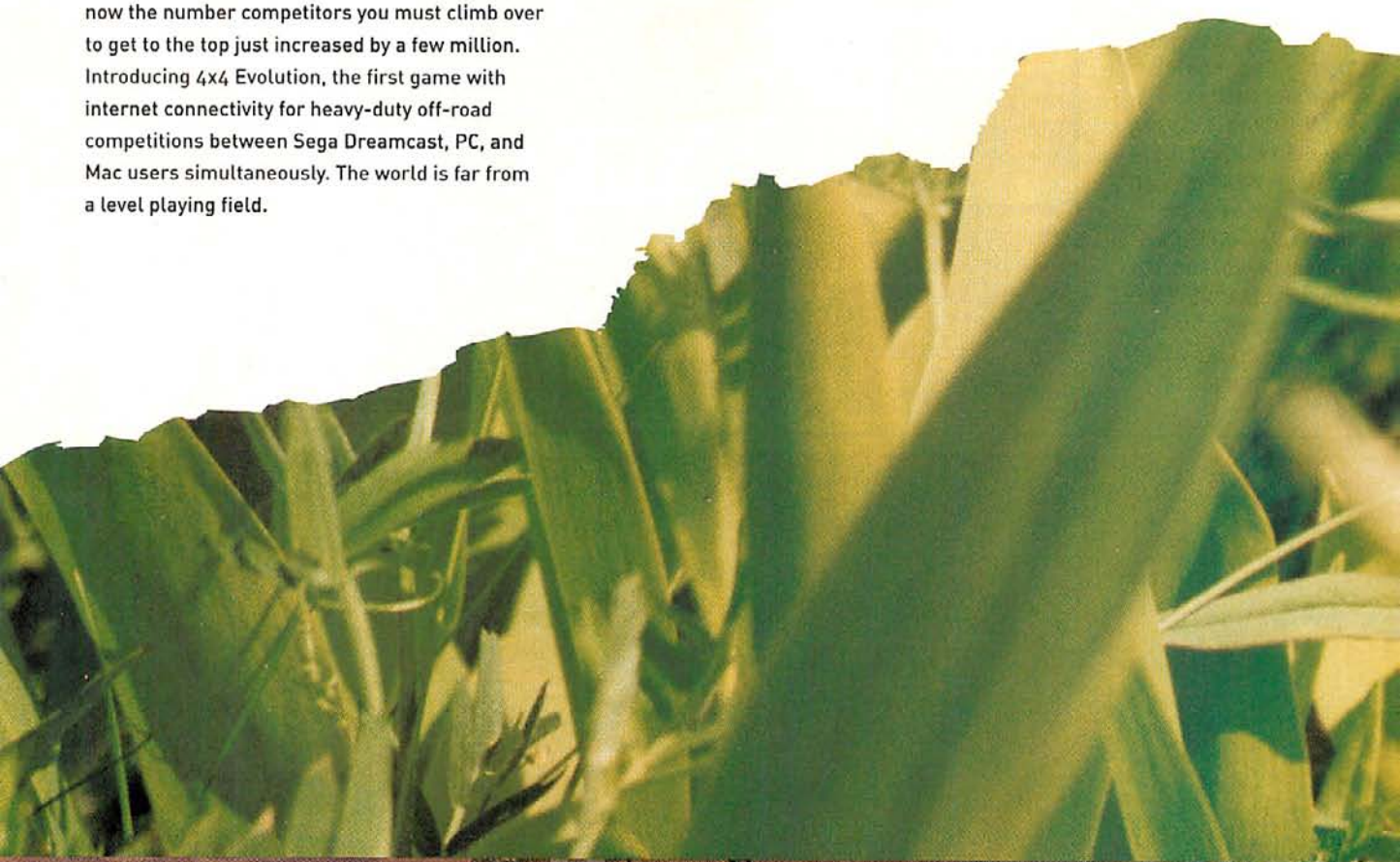
Maintaining the health of your units is one of the most important tasks you have, if you want their continued service. Keep your APC near important units by putting it in Guard mode. It will replenish the health of the unit it is protecting, as well as any of your other units that pass by. Medium Terradynes can be equipped with a deployable radar station that can come in very handy in battlefield situations. If your units are slugging it out toe to toe in fixed positions, simply line them up directly in front of the repair station, and they'll be constantly healed as they take fire.



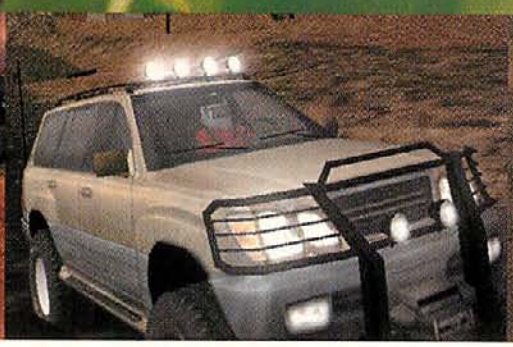
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DEUS EX

by Thierry Nguyen

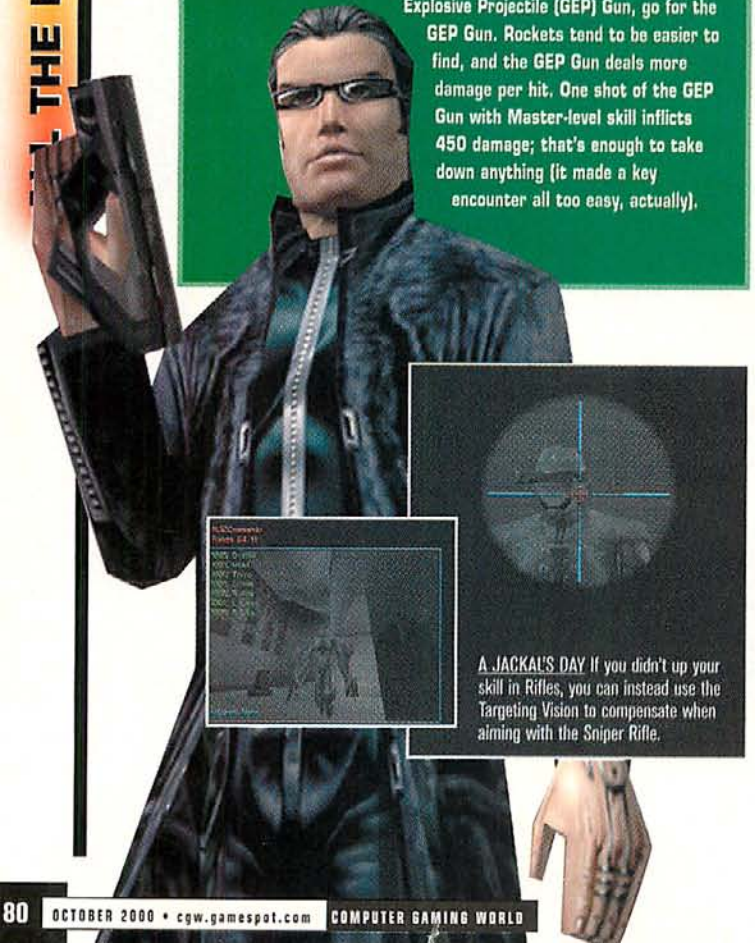
DEUS EX is all about choices. Now, you can choose to ignore this handy strategy guide, but when the Majestic-12 lock you up, plant bugs into your stomach, and start monitoring your bowel movements, don't say we didn't warn you. Here are the essential skills and augmentations you should have to get through the game.

THUNDER OF HIS GUNS

■■■ Before proceeding any further, know this: The Rifles skill is the most useful weapons skill in the entire game. If you had to pick one weapon to master in, it's this one. For one thing, many weapons are classified as rifles, namely the assault rifle, the sniper rifle, the shotgun, and the assault shotgun. With the exception of Low-Tech, no other weapon skill offers as broad an arsenal as Rifles. Since ammunition is on the scarce side, you might as well specialize in the skill that will give you the most guns.

As an extra bonus, being Master-level in Rifles allows you to shoot down cameras and turrets with one shot of the sniper rifle. With the exception of greasels, karkians, and security/military bots, a head shot on Master level will put down anyone, no matter what.

Besides that, you'll also want to develop your Heavy Weapons skill. The main benefits in upgrading this skill are increases in movement speed and inflicted damage. Between the two signature weapons, the Plasma Rifle or the Guided Explosive Projectile (GEP) Gun, go for the GEP Gun. Rockets tend to be easier to find, and the GEP Gun deals more damage per hit. One shot of the GEP Gun with Master-level skill inflicts 450 damage; that's enough to take down anything (it made a key encounter all too easy, actually).

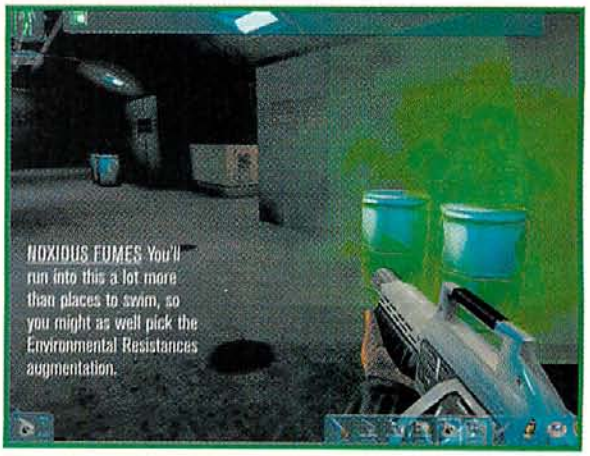


A JACKAL'S DAY If you didn't up your skill in Rifles, you can instead use the Targeting Vision to compensate when aiming with the Sniper Rifle.

TUNE IN KEY

Most of the puzzles involve either locked doors or security systems. With such flexibility, choosing between Lockpicking and Electronics becomes tricky. It's all a matter of preference, but you should try to Master, or at least be Advanced, in one and just stay Trained in the other.

You should at minimum be Trained in Computers, and preferably be Advanced. Trained will at least let you be able to hack into computers, but Advanced will also let you control Security Turrets. You don't need to Master computers, because even Trained will give you enough time to turn off cameras or read e-mails with important passwords in them.



NOXIOUS FUMES You'll run into this a lot more than places to swim, so you might as well pick the Environmental Resistances augmentation.

THE EYES HAVE IT

Both choices for the eye augmentations are tempting. The Vision Enhancement has a bit more weight, mainly because at level three or higher, it will let you see enemies through walls. Whether you play as a shooter or a sneaker, the ability to see the enemy beyond a wall gives you a huge tactical advantage. If you do indeed go for this Augmentation, be sure to save Upgrade Canisters so that you can at least upgrade to level three, where the sonar imaging kicks in.

The Targeting Vision is mediocre, for the most part, but it has one thing going for it: It compensates for your shaky hands when aiming. So, if your Rifles skill isn't high enough, but you have a couple levels put into Targeting, your eyes will steady the rifle when using the scope. But it's better to just Master Rifles and use Vision Enhancement instead.

HEAL ME O' SAVIOR

■■■ Regeneration is the most useful out of all the augmentations. Do not pass up Regeneration. Upgraded enough, it can heal 40 hit points per second. Even at low levels, it will return between five to ten hit points per second. Since bio-electric cells are everywhere—provided you can find a quiet place for a bit—you'll never need fear death with this augmentation.

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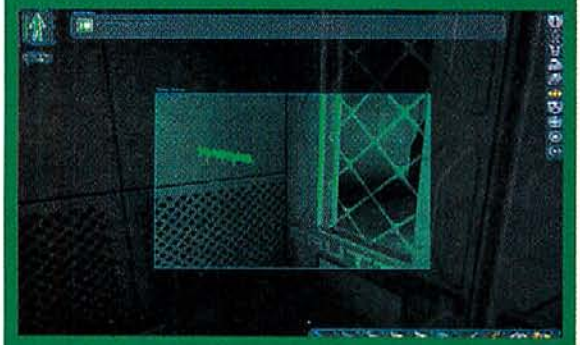
ROCKETING SPIES AWAY

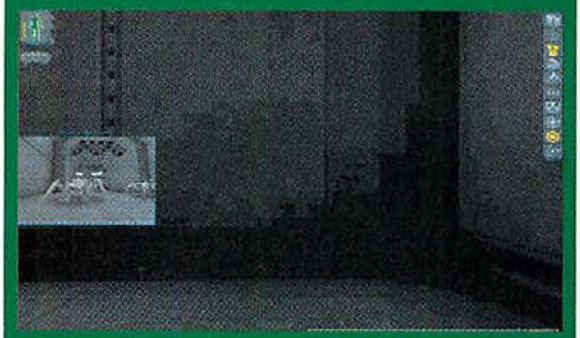
The cranial augmentation is also a bit of a tricky choice. The question boils down to: Do you have the firepower to take down bots? If not, go for the Spy Drone, because it serves as a makeshift EMP grenade when you dispose of it. If you are packing a GEP Gun or a Plasma Rifle, opt for the Aggressive Defense System, since that will take down any incoming projectiles the bots throw at you, allowing you to pummel them.

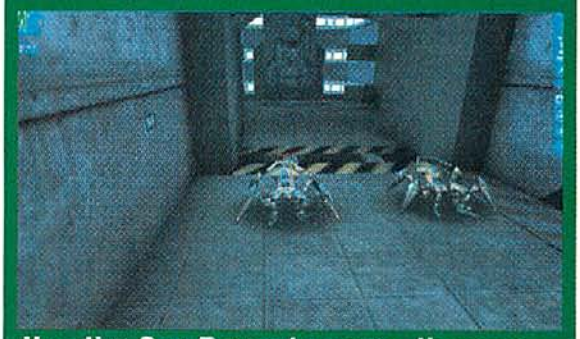
JUMP, JUMP!

For your legs, go for Speed Enhancement. Moving Silently is a nice gimmick, but you need to have it at maximum level to benefit from it. Even a level-one addition to the Speed Enhancement helps when making certain jumps, or going down certain falls. A fully-upgraded Speed Enhancement makes you extremely difficult to hit, as you're moving way too fast and you can jump to places where the AI can't aim very well.

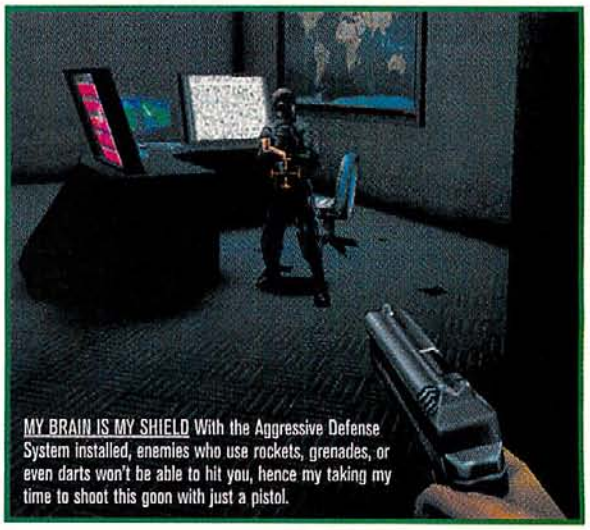
EYE SPY







Use the Spy Drone to scope the area out, and then send it in for a kamikaze EMP discharge to disable any robots in the area.

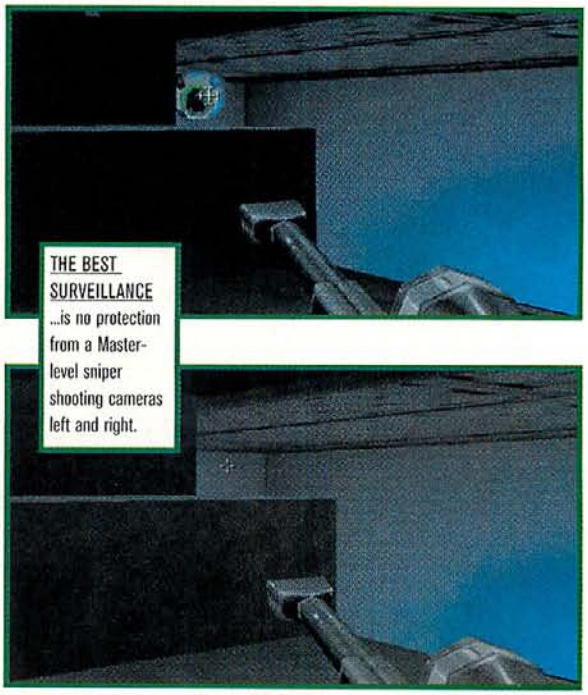


MY BRAIN IS MY SHIELD With the Aggressive Defense System installed, enemies who use rockets, grenades, or even darts won't be able to hit you, hence my taking my time to shoot this goon with just a pistol.

GREENPEACE SOLDIER

One of the early augmentation choices is between Environmental Resistance and Aqualung. No brainer here: Go for Environmental Resistance. Fact is, there's not that much swimming, but there're lots of radioactive/poisonous areas, and enemies will hit you with either poisonous spray or tranquilizer darts. Unless you plan to go out of your way to swim somewhere, take the Environmental Resistance.

The rest of character development is up to your own preference, but with the skills and augmentations outlined here, you'll have a much easier time making your way through a world that pretty much hates you.



THE BEST SURVEILLANCE ...is no protection from a Master-level sniper shooting cameras left and right.



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SHOGUN: TOTAL WAR

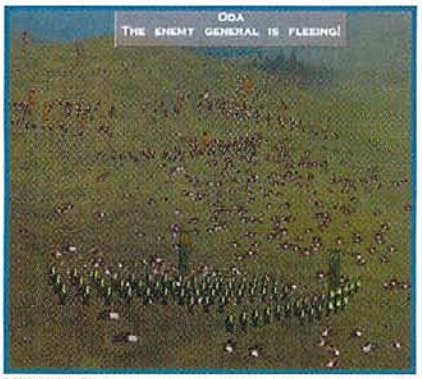
by Raphael Liberatore

■■■ 3D combat is the heart and soul of SHOGUN. Start by recruiting and training your army with the proper mix of unit types. Always assess the strengths and weaknesses of your provinces before building structures. It helps to know the available bonuses within each individual province.

BATTLEFIELD TACTICS

Use adverse weather to your advantage. Snow, rain, and wind impact a unit's fatigue, morale, and overall unit performance. Study terrain and search for hills, forests, and choke points before battle. High ground adds an attack bonus to ranged units. Attacking downhill provides bonuses to melee units as well.

The Close Formation is effective for melee, but is susceptible to missile attacks. Loose Formations are best used for lessening the impact of ranged attacks. Wedge Formations are useful for penetrating enemy lines. Use "Engage at Will" for the Warrior Monks, Naginata, and No-Dachi Samurai, since their morale rating allows them to work independently of the Taisho.



RUNAWAY! Chasing down a routed enemy keeps you from having to fight them later. Cavalry and No-Dachi units are best suited for giving chase.

Try to keep your units fresh. Maneuver units by marching; run only when you attack. Attacking the rear or flanks of the enemy will net you the highest attack bonuses. Killing the enemy Taisho lowers the enemies' morale and makes a rout more likely. Increase your troop's morale by positioning friendly units at their rear.

Early on, create lots of Archers. Using large formations of Archers supported by a few units of Yari Ashigaru or Yari Samurai is very effective. Have your Archers "Fire at Will," since they will select the best units to attack, and will avoid attacking your own forces. Form them in two rows and keep them from firing behind an obstruction like a forest or hill to avoid wasting ammo. When attacking an enemy entrenched atop a hill, sneak Yari Cavalry to their rear. Defend when the enemy possesses a higher honor than yours.

Begin the battle using ranged attacks, and



BRIDGE CROSSING

■■■ River crossings require careful analysis, planning, and persistence. Cross the bridge as quickly as possibly using cavalry—or heavily armored units like the Naginata—in a loose formation. Once they've gained a foothold, follow with cavalry and additional heavy units. Support with archers positioned along the banks of the river near the bridge. Alternatively, try feinting with melee units to draw the enemy near the bridge so you can shower them with arrows.



YARI ASHIGARU

Strengths: Inexpensive. Highly mobile. Gain honor rather quickly.
Weaknesses: Low armor rating and low morale.
Tactics: Good for cannon fodder against ranged attack or bridge and hill assaults. Useful later in the battle if kept fresh. Yari also serve as protection for archers, and stand up well to Cavalry.

SAMURAI ARCHERS

Strengths: Inexpensive. Ranged attack.
Weaknesses: Low armor rating. Susceptible to both ranged and melee attacks. Limited supply of arrows. Susceptible to adverse weather conditions. Ineffective in forests.
Tactics: Put them on the high ground. Useful in melee when arrows are depleted. Can easily defeat Yari Ashigaru in melee combat.

YARI SAMURAI

Strengths: Easy to upgrade. Useful for both attacking and defending. Above-average armor, honor, and defensive bonuses. Yari are effective against just about any unit, including Cavalry.
Weaknesses: Less mobile than Yari Ashigaru.
Tactics: Samurai are the backbone of your army. Highly effective charging heavy cavalry when supported by Archers. Useful in protecting ranged units.

NO-DACHI SAMURAI

Strengths: Highly mobile. Possess higher than normal honor and attack bonuses. Can operate independently of their Taisho.
Weaknesses: Vulnerable to ranged attacks because of low armor rating. Poor defenders.
Tactics: Put in a wedge formation to break lines of defense. No-Dachi make excellent scouts or flanking units since they can operate at a great distance from their Taisho. However, when taking a defensive stand, hide the No-Dachi in forests or at the rear of the army, and attack when the enemy is fatigued.

NAGINATA

Strengths: High armor rating. Best defensive unit in the game.
Weaknesses: Extremely limited mobility. Fatigue quickly.
Tactics: Naginata are used primarily for attacking bridges, hill positions, and castles. Naginata are also effective against enemy Cavalry. When taking the defensive, they should be used as the centerline of defense. Upgrading their armor makes them difficult to break in battle.

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BUILDING A BETTER FUTURE::

StarTopia takes gamers to a once thriving galactic network of starships, space stations and planets left lifeless with redundant scars of the apocalypse. You will lead the way in rebuilding the network of space stations that once served the commerce and communication of the old empire - reuniting the surviving alien peoples under one banner.



This simulation gives you the opportunity to rebuild and successfully maintain a series of giant donut-like Torus space stations that are scattered across the galaxy. These stations provide a suitable home for the many alien races that inhabit space, but can also provide you with a tidy profit. Of course, there are plenty of other enterprising individuals out there with the same goals, not to mention the many hazards that exist in deep space. Will you use economic or military means to force out your opponents? You decide.



FEATURES::

- Nine primary character races, each with a unique look and function. Each inhabitant is an individual character, with unique moods, desires and personal history and humorous character animations.
- Fully functioning alien society and economy, with racial animosity and friendships, crime and punishment, as well as leisure and entertainment.
- Unique "Torus" play area gives a viewpoint never before seen in a game.
- Bio-deck with editable landscape and manageable ecosystem allowing complete control of terra-forming.
- Multi-player support for up to three other stationmasters.
- Varied levels of play, from simple sandbox to detailed station micromanagement.
- Trade and auction goods and services with other players and alien races.
- Research improvements and develop new technologies.
- Simple and intuitive command of security forces for direct conflict with other players or defense against alien threats.





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ARQUEBUSIERS

Strengths: Longer attack range than Archers. Unlimited supply of ammo.
Weaknesses: Susceptible to adverse weather conditions. Low armor and honor. Ineffective melee fighters. Forests.
Tactics: Form Arquebusiers at the base of a hill, and concentrate their attacks on the enemy ranged units.

MUSKETEERS

Strengths: Improved version of the Arquebusier. Lethal close-combat attacks. High mobility. Not affected by weather.
Weaknesses: Low armor. Susceptible to melee attacks. Forests.
Tactics: Like the Arquebusier, Musketeers are most effective at close range. Forming Musketeers at the forefront of your army, three or four ranks deep, increases their rate of fire and gives them three to four times their normal attack rating.

WARRIOR MONKS

Strengths: Extremely high attack and honor ratings. Mobile. Difficult to rout.
Weaknesses: Expensive and difficult to recruit. No armor bonus.
Tactics: Warrior monks are most effective when "Engaging at will." However, since they are vulnerable to ranged attacks, Naginata or Yari Samurai should be used to protect them. Warrior Monks are most effective when employing a pincer and flanking movement, since they do not fatigue as easily as other units.

CAVALRY ARCHERS

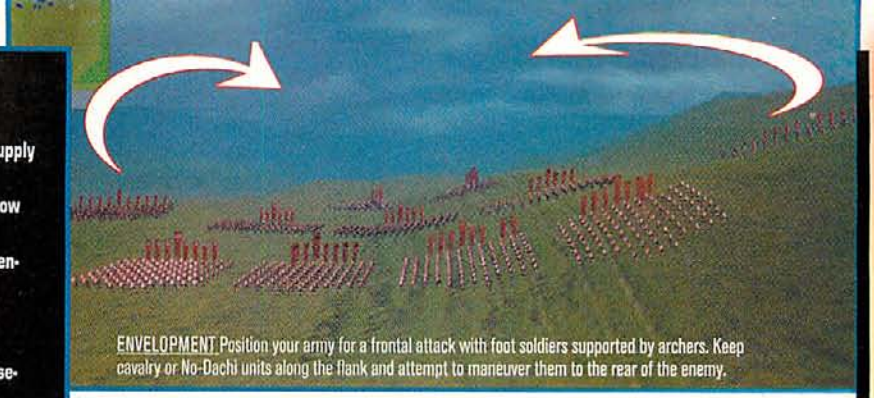
Strengths: Highly mobile. Make excellent scouts. Flexible ranged and melee fighters.
Weaknesses: Expensive. Not as accurate as Samurai Archers.
Tactics: Immediately send Cavalry Archers on a scouting mission to uncover the enemy. Once located, position Cavalry Archers on an elevated vantage near the enemy to harass them while they're forming for battle. Cavalry Archers make effective melee troops and can be used to attack the enemy's rear.

YARI CAVALRY

Strengths: Mobility. Balanced attack, defense, and honor.
Weaknesses: Expensive. Vulnerable to frontal assaults against ranged attacks, Yari Samurai, and/or Naginata charges. Fatigue easily in bad weather. Useless in forests.
Tactics: Yari Cavalry make excellent scouts and are most effective against light infantry and archers. Use them to outflank units while charging from the enemies' rear. Deploy Yari Cavalry against the enemy Taisho's unit in order to lower their morale. Yari Cavalry are also useful in routing enemy units. Use Yari Cavalry to attack pesky Cavalry Archers.

HEAVY CAVALRY

Strengths: Best attack rating of any unit. Highly mobile.
Weaknesses: Expensive. Highly susceptible to adverse weather conditions or terrain. Weak against Yari or No Dachi Samurai.
Tactics: Heavy Cavalry can defeat any unit on flat terrain or when fighting downhill. Heavy Cavalry in a frontal attack have additional charge bonuses. Keep them at the flanks to outmaneuver enemy thrusts. Group Heavy Cavalry with Cavalry Archers for added attack value.

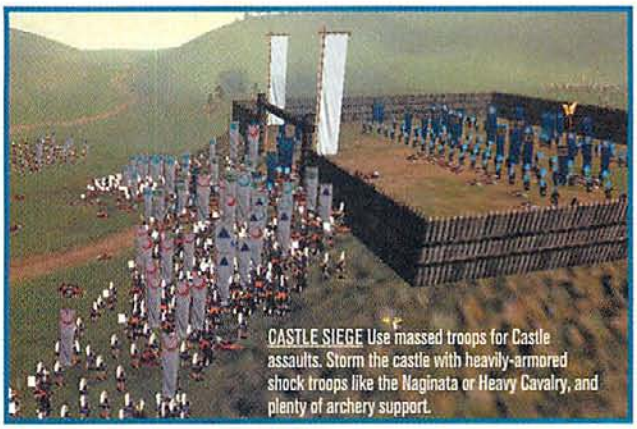


ENVELOPMENT Position your army for a frontal attack with foot soldiers supported by archers. Keep cavalry or No-Dachi units along the flank and attempt to maneuver them to the rear of the enemy.

follow up with a frontal assault using spearmen first, then your special units, all the while attempting to envelope and pinch the enemy using Cavalry and No Dachi. When attacking uphill, launch missile attacks and lead the assault with No Dachi or Yari Ashigaru, while flanking with Yari Cavalry and/or Warrior Monks. If you have the high ground, concentrate your ranged attacks on the enemies' best troops. Form your troops using the "Hold Position." When the arrows run dry, charge Archers downhill supported by melee units.

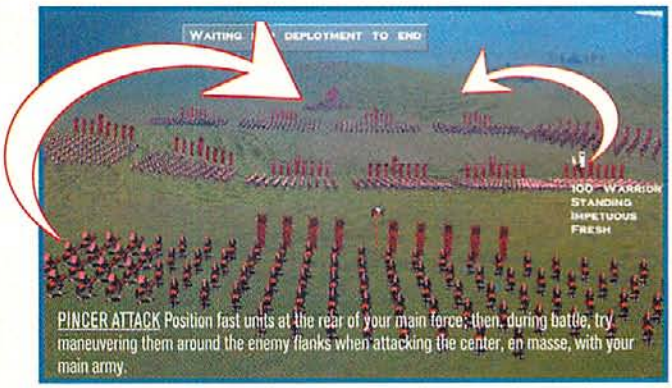
If the enemy uses Cavalry Archers as skirmishers, hold them off with Yari Ashigaru or Samurai. If the enemy is using a lot of archers, then place Naginata in "Open Formation" in front of your archers to protect them while concentrating ranged attacks on them. If you move your Taisho near the battle, keep him in the rear of your army and out of reach of the enemy's archers. If the risk is warranted, attack the enemy's general. Use Yari Cavalry for scouting and envelopment maneuvers, and later, when the battle turns in your favor, they'll be in position to hunt routing troops. Don't use your Cavalry to attack Ashigaru in a frontal assault. If your enemy has only a few expensive troops, let some Yari attack them in "Hold Formation" mode.

Victory begins with knowing your troops, applying effective formations,



CASTLE SIEGE Use massed troops for Castle assaults. Storm the castle with heavily-armored shock troops like the Naginata or Heavy Cavalry, and plenty of archery support.

understanding the terrain and weather effects, and assessing your enemy. Once these concepts are mastered, the proper application of force will become second nature, and soon, you will become Shogun.



PINCER ATTACK Position fast units at the rear of your main force; then, during battle, try maneuvering them around the enemy flanks when attacking the center, en masse, with your main army.

MAGIC - SPELLS - CREATURES
WARFARE - WITH TEETH!

Actual Gameplay Screens







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Real-Time Strategic... role-playing action

Describe Sacrifice . . .

- You enter a world where you can actually drag your enemies back to your Altar, and then Sacrifice them to pleasure your Gods. The rewards and power you receive are beyond your imagination.

Is there more to the game?

(1) Single Player (The Epic Strategy/RPG side of the game spread over 46 scenarios)
(2) Multi-player (Over 20 scenarios via LAN, Modem or Internet)
(3) World Builder (Easily design and build your own levels - we supply everything)

What type of gamer will Sacrifice appeal to?

- Sacrifice is for the strategy gamers and action gamers that enjoy BATTLES more than the Farming.

Do you have to be mean or can you be nice?

- You can be nice, but you could kill an entire village of innocent peasants, then mix their souls with magic to build up your army of fighting creatures. Which would you prefer?

Can you describe some of the more powerful spells?

- There are over 100 spells in the game... One attack spell is called Death (very powerful)... It's a giant shrouded Reaper you create. He has a giant blade and cuts down your enemies like grass.
- Another spell allows you to summon all the boulders within the soil to punch high into the air and then crash down onto your enemies.
- Volcanoes, Tornadoes, Fire walls, Insect Swarms, world destruction and the list goes on...

What are people saying about it?

"One of the 20 games that will save the PC"
- Next Generation Magazine

"We were completely spellbound watching armies of fantastic creatures wander across hauntingly beautiful landscapes."
- PC.IGN

"Not since Halo" have I witnessed such amazing graphics in a PC game"
- Gamefan Online

"What may be the future Real-time Strategy Game of the Year"
- Incite PC Gaming Magazine

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COMING FALL 2000

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DARK REIGN 2

—George Jones

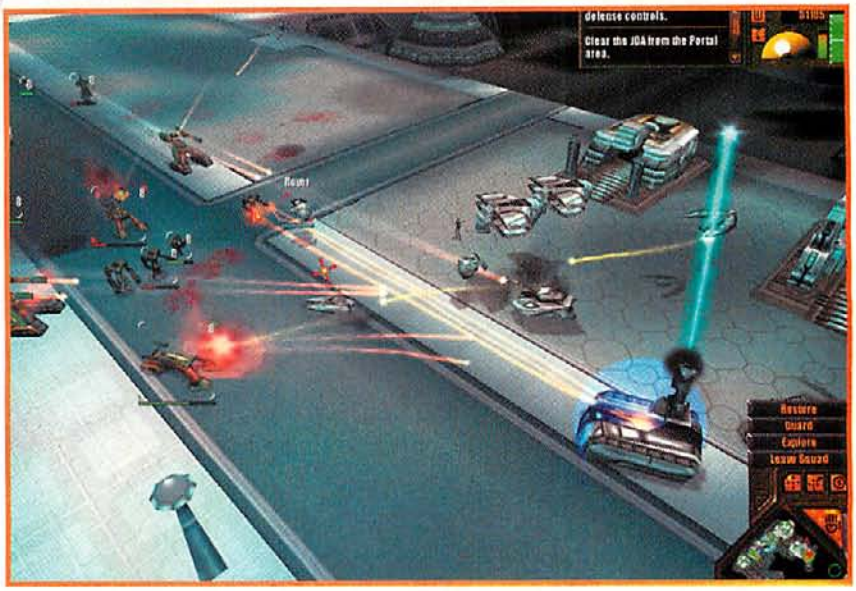
MISSION SPECIFIC TIPS

JDA Level 3

The escape shuttle is up and to the left. Get there before the escaping masses do, and you'll have a much easier time.

JDA Level 4

Whatever you do, when you pick up the artifact, don't attack the Barons. They're almost impossible to kill. The way to get out of this hairy trap is to position all of your units on the far side of the room, behind the Togran artifact. As you walk your units across the room, make sure they go nowhere near the artifact—otherwise the Baron Sameds will awaken.



Once you get your units by the future escape portal, send one Guardian in to capture the artifact. The Baron Sameds will awaken, but you'll be able to hurry all your forces—and the artifact—through the portal before they get to you.

Supposedly there is a way to kill the twin beasts. Pin them to the wall by attacking them from afar, retreating as you go. If you hit them all at once, it's supposed to work.

The evac site for the Togran artifact is really hard to find. It's the exact spot where you got your reinforcements.

JDA Level 8

It's critical that you use your patrol boats and heavy artillery to take out the northern installation of Sky Sweepers and Gun Turrets as soon as possible. To do this, you'll have to take out the small island defenses first—this will help out with the Western shuttle approach vector. Don't worry about the Northeast approach—it's clear. You'll need to send units in to polish off the South approach route, but it's not too difficult. Be extra careful of mines on this mission...they're everywhere, particularly in the canyons of the Southern shuttle path.

JDA Level 9

The trick to this mission is, as stated, occupying the four choke points. Take your time—twelve minutes is more than enough. You'll need two gigantic forces—one for the northern area of the map, and one for the Eastern sector. Use your vehicles here; they're extremely effective in taking out the enemy buildings and gun turrets. Try not to use too many of the Enforcer units—they'll be too slow tracking down fleeing senators.

Once you've destroyed the various enemy installations, keep cranking out the units. Don't go near the Senate building, though. It's almost in the lower center of the map, and if you get near it, the Senators will immediately begin their sprint for freedom, regardless of the clock.

If you've established the choke points, picking the senators off is easy money. If you don't, the mission becomes almost impossible. Rovers flanked by Castigars work best for flagging down the enemy. Just make sure that whatever you do, you don't destroy the Senate building—this will instantly cause you to lose the mission.

Sprawler Mission 5

To assassinate the Judas leader within 30 minutes, you have to move quickly. As fast as you can, crank out a number of Scorpion tanks, Go-Gos, and Skulks. Get your Shrine built—don't worry about upgrading it, though. All you need is Eyebiter, to blind enemy gun towers as you move past it. Heavy artillery will help you take out some of the gun turrets, but only if you have a number of Infiltrators that can serve as spotters.

If you can afford it, secure the hill to your north and build a Vehicle Factory (can't remember name—can someone check the manual) there. This way you can send in reinforcements more quickly. Don't worry about air vehicles—they're a pain on this level.

Once you're set, send in a massive frontal assault. Take them as far north as you can, destroying every gun turret and Sky Sweeper along the way. Use Eyebiter liberally, and use your group of six to eight skulks to protect your armored units from the Judas soldiers, which are tough against vehicles. While you're doing this, start building your second assault wave—these are going to be the forces that rush in and finish the job.

Sprawler Mission 7

The bottom line is this: You gotta have a mine-detecting unit. Scour every single step of the way, or you'll lose precious resources rebuilding your armies.

Sprawler Mission 9

This is one of the hardest missions in the game. Get your base up and running, but do not explore—it's just going to provoke the enemy. Once your base is moving, you're mining the Taelon from the location to the right of your base, and you've built several gun turrets and cameras, send a squadron of Judas' and a Voodun through the portal, right in your base camp. They'll appear to the north in a grassy area.

From here, move them further north along the grass until you reach the motherlode of Taelon fields. Send a Construction probe and two extra Collectors through, and get mining. Make sure you protect both ends of the Taelon field with gun turrets, cameras, and anti-air weapons. You'll need them.

The Falcon Towers aren't too hard to destroy from this point. Build a Dock on the waterfront next to the immense Taelon field, and take out the Sprawler boats and Wharf. The Falcon Tower is right on the far side of the water. Build a camera on the land nearby the Tower (it's close to the portal gate you first came through), and use your heavy artillery (which you moved to the Taelon-rich area) to destroy them.

Also mission 9: You have to send a juggernaut through the portal. The objective isn't stated clearly. —*George Jones*

MDK2

ALL THE RIGHT MOVES!

ITEMS

■■■ *Objects Picked up by Doc Hawkins Throughout the Game*

- Atomic Toaster (supplied by Kermit)
- Baguette
- Dirty Towels
- Duct Tape
- Electrical (power) Cord
- Fishbowl
- Hand Dryer
- Kurt's Coordinates
- Ladder
- Lighter
- Loaf
- Magnet
- Mr. Fizzy
- Palatial Locator
- Pipes
- Plutonium
- Positronic Doohickey
- Pumpernickel
- The Sauce
- Toaster

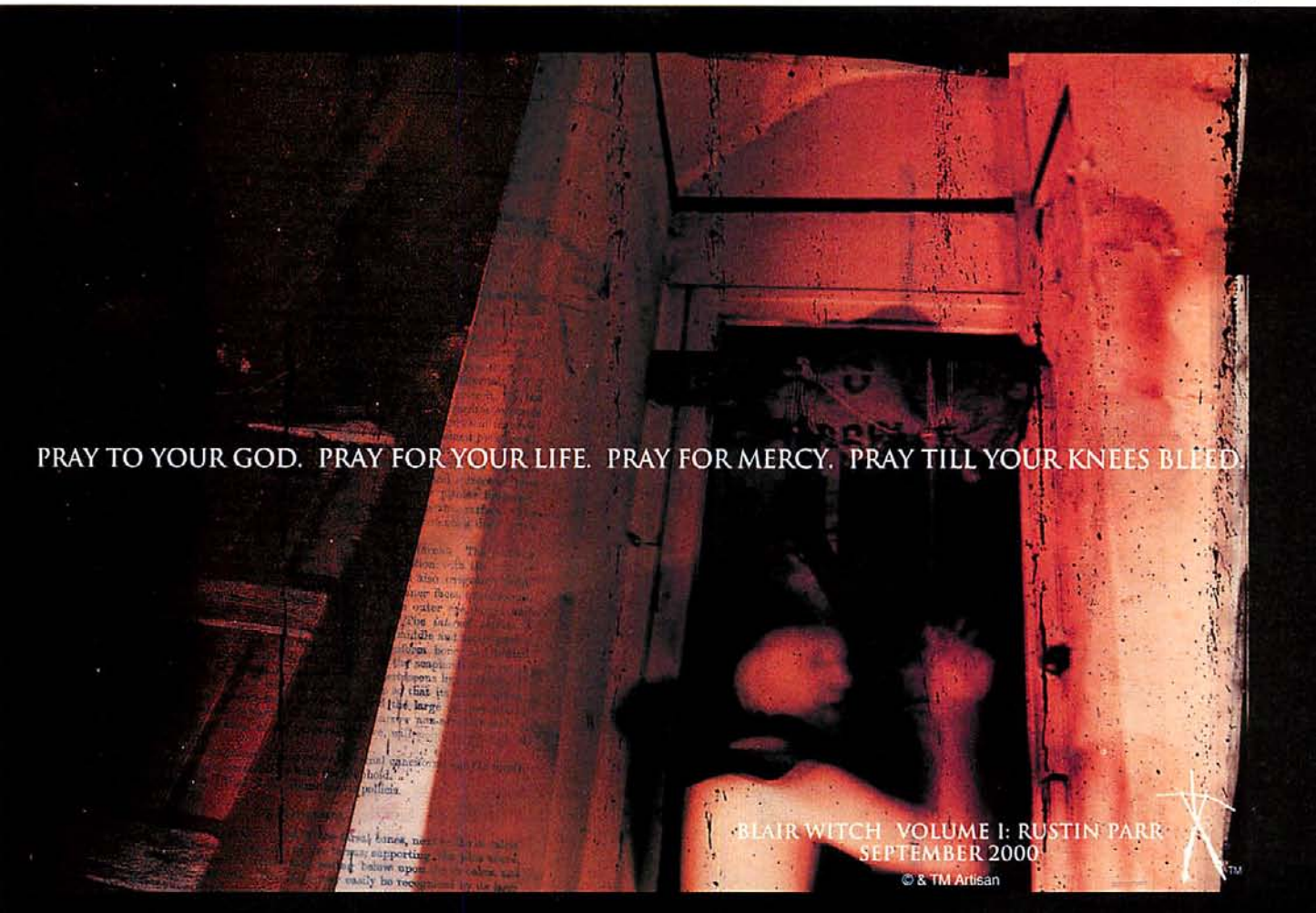


CREATIONS

■■■ *What the Doc Can Make by Combining Items*

Antigravity Boots (Magnets + Duct Tape)
Atomic Toaster (created by Kermit from the Toaster)
Ladder (Pipes + Electrical Cord)
Leaf Blower (Pipes + Hand Dryer + Duct Tape)

Item or Combination	Resulting Effect
Atomic Toaster	No effect by itself, but when combined with the Loaf, creates a deadly bouncing piece of Atomic Toast
Atomic Toaster + Baguette	Guided Toast Missile
Atomic Toaster + Ladder	Electrical Shock
Atomic Toaster + Loaf	Atomic Toast Projectile
Atomic Toaster + Pumpernickel	Dry Toast Mortar
Dirty Towels	No effect by themselves
Duct Tape	Used to fix a hole later in Level 3; also used with the Magnets to make Antigravity Boots
Empty Fishbowl	Used in Level 3 to prevent choking when the atmosphere is sucked out of a room
Fishbowl	Used in Level 3 to start the Fish Game
Hand Dryer	No effect by itself
Leaf Blower (Pipes + Hand Dryer, with Duct Tape)	Blows enemies aside
Lighter	Lights up darkened areas
Loaf	No effect by itself
Magnet	No effect by itself
Molotov (The Sauce + Dirty Towels)	No effect by itself, but when combined with the Lighter...kaboom!
Molotov + Lighter	Thrown Molotov
Mr. Fizzy	Heals 50 points
Pipes	No effect by itself
Plutonium (first from Kermit)	When consumed, it turns Doc into Mr. Hyde
The Sauce	No effect by itself
The Sauce + Lighter	Explosion
Toast (Loaf + Toaster)	No effect by itself
Toaster	No effect by itself
Toaster + Loaf	Toast



MOTOCROSS MADNESS 2

by Tom Price

MASTERING MORENCI

Pitted with open rock quarries and full of heavy equipment traffic, the Morenci Mine level is one of the most challenging in MOTOCROSS MADNESS 2. Its three tracks—Mass Air II, Mechanized Mayhem, and Quantum Leap—all provide a series of challenges that only the best on two wheels can overcome. Here are some tips to put you ahead of the field.

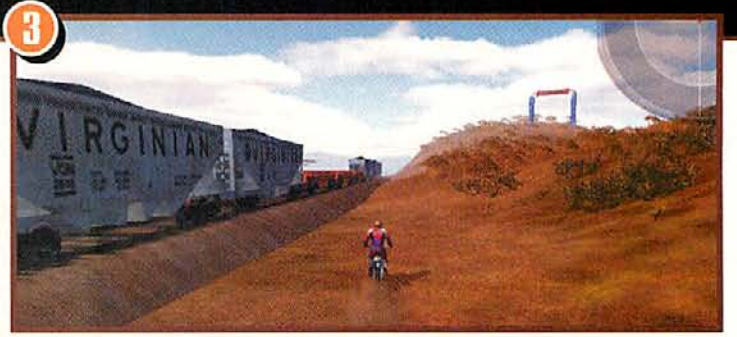


THE LAST JUMP The finish line is dead ahead over the hill, so if you gun it and hit the apex of that little howl just past the gate at full throttle, you should sail all the way over the hill to the backside, and right through the finish gate.

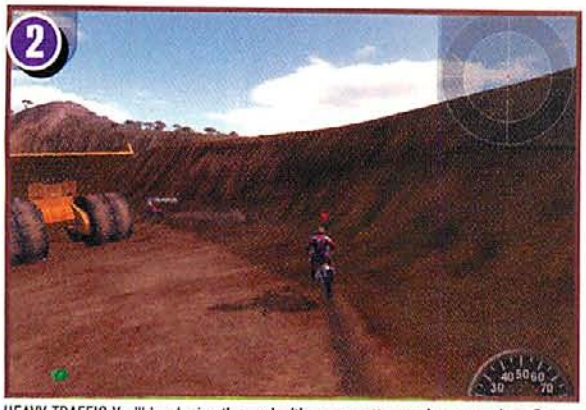




I SEE THE JUMP A-COMIN' The jump to gate 5 is one of the most spectacular in the game. Turn your bike in a wide arc to make sure you've got enough speed to clear to the other side. When you get to the top of the jump, aim at the right side of the gate. An open quarry is just to the right, waiting to swallow you up.



CURSE THAT INFERNAL TRAIN Well, it's not bothering us this time. Streak right up the hill, go through the left side of the gate, and you should find yourself right on track for the next one.



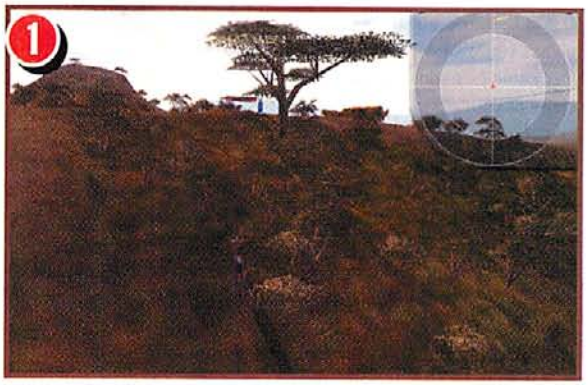
HEAVY TRAFFIC You'll be sharing the road with some pretty massive companions. Do your best to stay out of their way by taking the outside track.



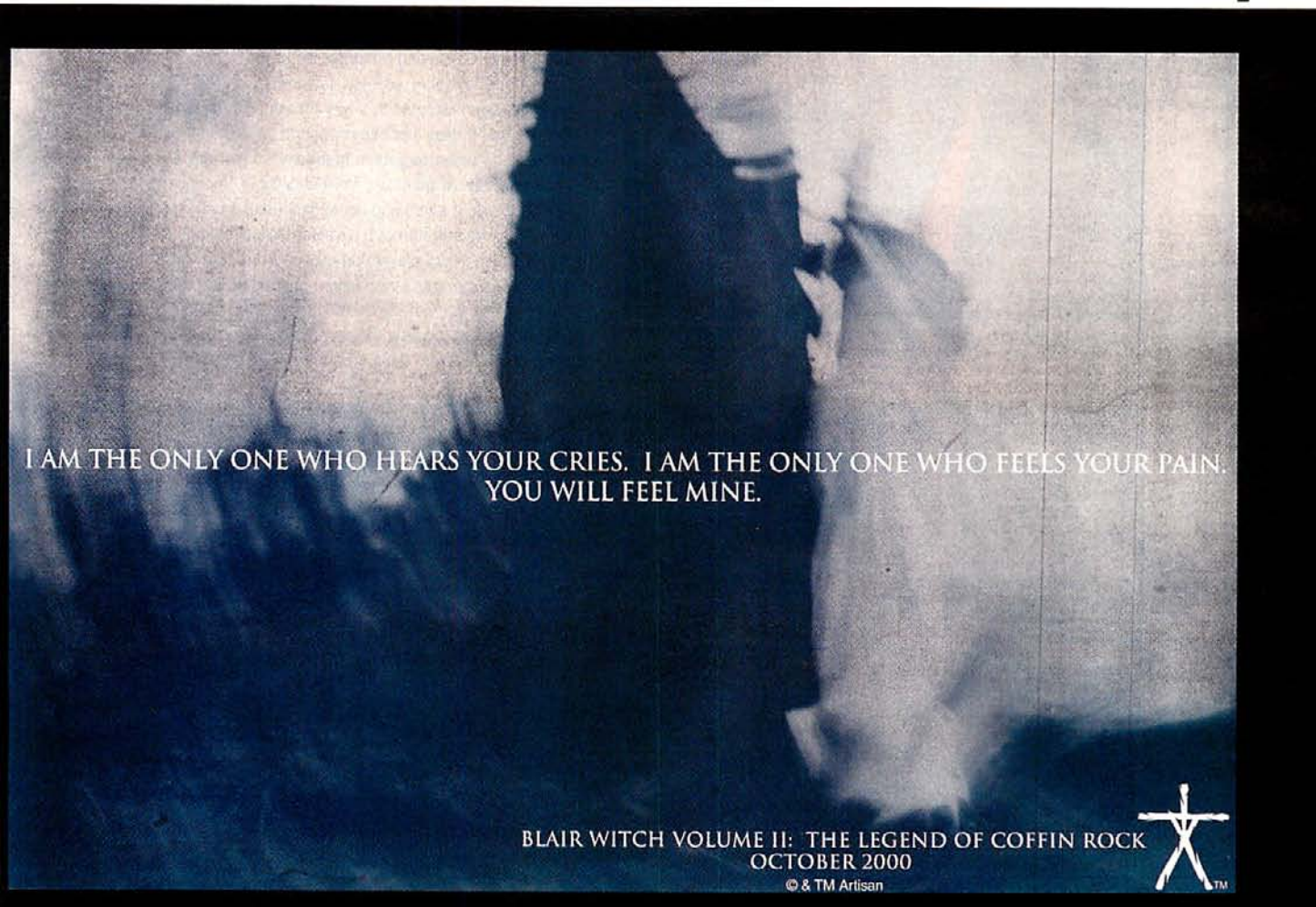
CLEAR That damn train will get in your way any chance it gets. Thankfully, there's a little ramp near gate 10 on Mass Air II.



FLYING HIGH Hit the rim of the quarry after Mass Air II's gate 5 as fast as possible. You shouldn't have too much of a problem landing this stratospheric jump, considering the landing is on a downslope. Just look out for those power lines...

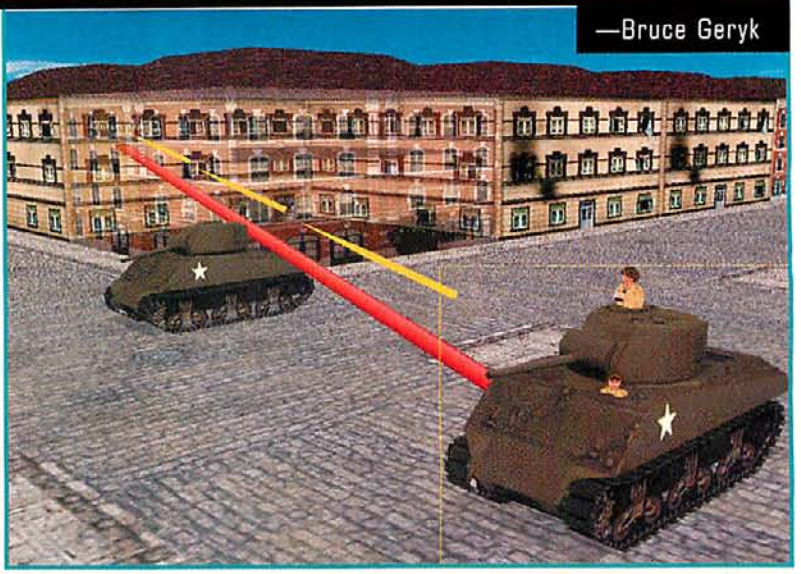


UP A TREE Once you clear the first gate on Mechanized Mayhem, go straight up the hill to the next gate. Whatever you do, stay to the left of the tree, otherwise you'll go tumbling deep into the quarry off to the left.



COMBAT MISSION

—Bruce Geryk



PANZERSCHRECK! These tanks advanced without infantry support and were ambushed by an anti-tank team. Always keep infantry close by your tanks to engage enemy infantry.

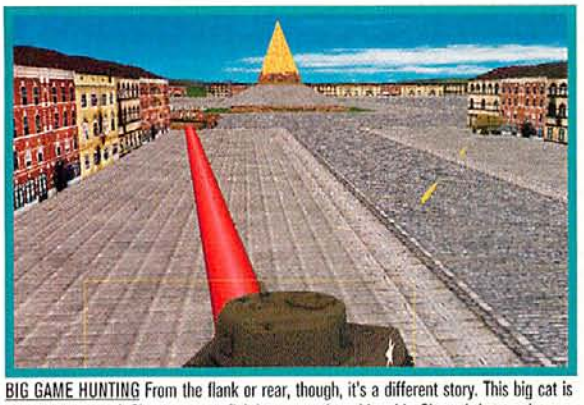
ATTACK STRATEGIES

"Get there firstest with the mostest."

■■■ Concentration of force is crucial when attacking. Massed firepower, even just locally, often wins battles. After obtaining enemy dispositions through reconnaissance, concentrate your forces to achieve local superiority while the enemy remains dispersed. Just move quickly.

■■■ Leapfrog positions when advancing, unless you're under serious time constraints. Pick some positions you want to reach, have some of your troops lay down covering fire, and advance the rest. When the advancing troops reach their positions, pick out some even more advanced positions, and move the covering fire troops you left behind *past* your newly advanced units (which will now provide the covering fire) and into more forward positions. This ensures that advancing troops will always have support. Don't try to leapfrog too far, though, or you'll outrun your suppression fire.

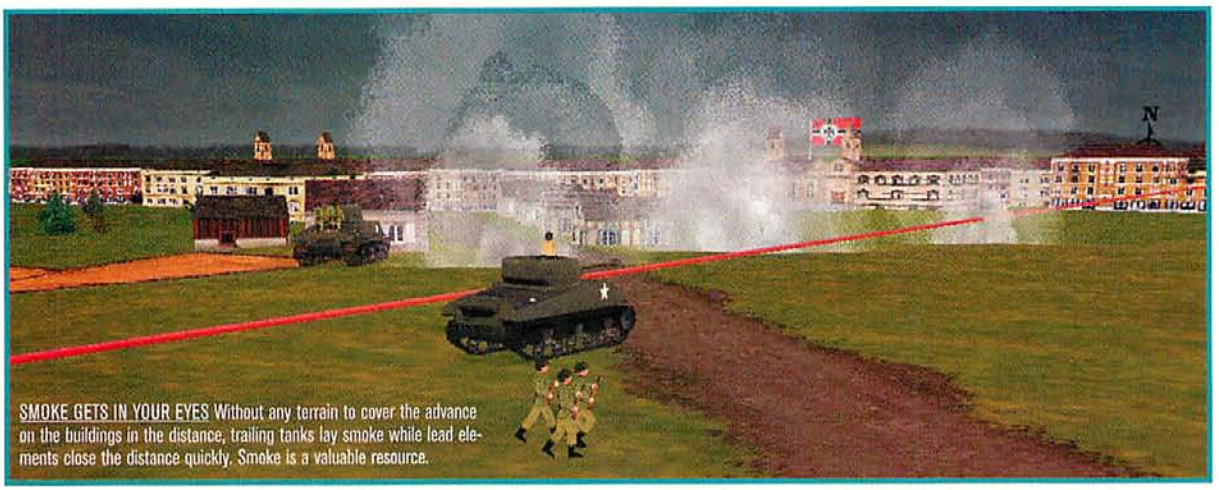
■■■ If you can't leapfrog, advance *en masse*. Choose a few units to lay down suppressing fire and move everyone else forward. Advancing piecemeal lets the enemy concentrate his fire on a select few of your units. Giving him a lot of targets at once will reduce your casualties—unless the enemy has local force superiority, in which case you probably shouldn't be advancing in the first place!



BIG GAME HUNTING From the flank or rear, though, it's a different story. This big cat is about to be caged. Close-quarters fighting evens the odds a bit. Oh, and that truck on the right is toast, too.

■■■ Infantry that has taken cover in a building can be very difficult to dislodge with direct fire. An effective answer to this is to target the building itself with Area Fire. Light buildings will collapse quickly, while heavy buildings may need the added attention of a tank or two. Collapsing buildings do serious damage to the infantry trapped in the rubble, so wise defenders won't stick around a building that's been targeted this way for long. The drawbacks to Area Fire are that it uses lots of ammo, and units committed to Area Fire will pass up better targets to maintain the barrage. Monitor these units carefully. Another use for this tactic is "reconnaissance by fire." Not sure if a building contains hidden enemy units? Target it with Area Fire and find out. It's safer than charging.

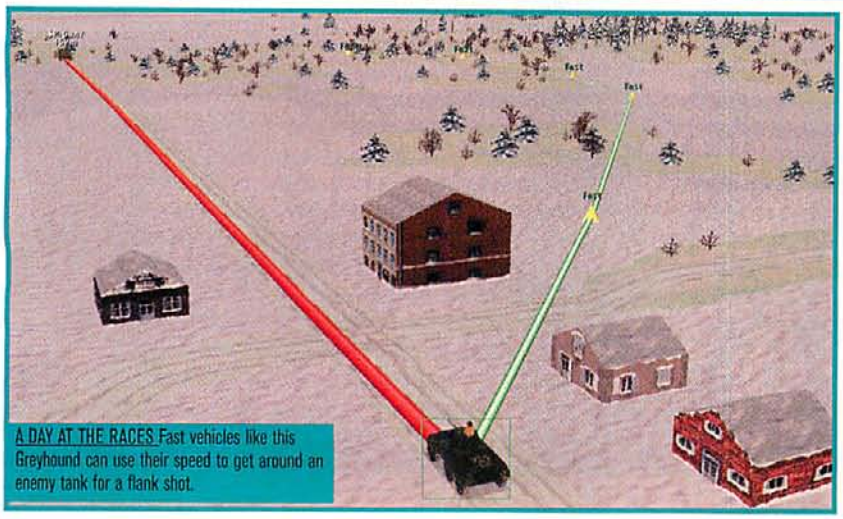
■■■ Those pesky crews that escape from your vehicles when they get knocked out aren't very useful in combat, but they're worth a ton of points, and getting them killed will hurt your side's morale. Shepherd them towards the rear as soon as possible. Losing a scenario on points from dead crews is sloppy play and avoidable.



SMOKE GETS IN YOUR EYES Without any terrain to cover the advance on the buildings in the distance, trailing tanks lay smoke while lead elements close the distance quickly. Smoke is a valuable resource.



BAD CONNECTION These green troops have advanced too fast and are now out of command. While more experienced troops can usually hold their own without a leader, doing this with green or conscript troops spells serious trouble. Keep track of your command lines.



A DAY AT THE RACES Fast vehicles like this Greyhound can use their speed to get around an enemy tank for a flank shot.



TARGET PRACTICE Can you see the Panther that knocked out one Sherman and is about to kill another? Neither can the unfortunate Free French tank crew. Tigers and Panthers have a huge armor and main-gun advantage. At long ranges in the open, Shermans don't stand a chance.



DEFENSIVE TACTICS

■■■ Successful defending is all about positioning. A seemingly strong defensive line can turn into a deathtrap for your units if there is no place to fall back to. A machine gun team in a heavy building surrounded by open fields will have to retreat across those fields if it gets into trouble. Keep that foremost in mind when setting up as the defender.

■■■ This focus on position extends to all aspects of defense. COMBAT MISSION programmer and designer Charles Moylan suggests, "Position defensive forces so that the attacker cannot bring all his weapons to bear, once he figures out where you are. Use intervening terrain to mask critical units from enemy units. A tank deployed just to the rear of a hill crest can often bring fire to bear along an entire flank, whilst being absolutely invisible to any enemy units not on that flank. Don't position infantry squads upstairs unless you have a plan. Once the enemy spots them, they'll make an easy target for anyone with a gun. Position snipers and antitank teams two-three meters away from the walls when they're in a building. It will help them stay undetected a lot longer."

■■■ Use your artillery! An attacker that has had to advance through three turns of an artillery barrage won't be nearly as strong as if he had made the move unhindered. Any long-range weapons (like machine guns) can be used to slow, harass, and cause attrition to attacking forces.

■■■ Keep a central reserve at all times. Shifting units laterally across a front is almost impossible, and withdrawing a unit and moving it around through the rear to a different sector takes far too long. If a hole develops, it's curtains. A single squad, fully-armed and supplied, can make a huge difference at the end of a scenario. Don't commit everything at once.

■■■ Don't be afraid to counterattack. Even a well-planned attack can be thrown into chaos if the defender can achieve a local force superiority somewhere and use it to counterattack. When counterattacking, all the rules of attacking apply. Concentrate your force, but don't weaken your defense so much that you allow breakthroughs elsewhere. Also, don't get carried away. A counterattack can be cut off and annihilated if it gets too far ahead of the main line of defense.

■■■ Trouble with Tigers? If you have the luxury, drop an artillery barrage on them. They have very little top armor.

The author would like to thank the entire COMBAT MISSION team for their thoughts on skillful play.

TEAM FORTRESS 1.5

by Alex Handy

■■■ Dustbowl is a tough map to defend on. When on offense, take advantage of this by using as many heavy weapons guys and soldiers as you can. Defenders should be engineers, snipers, and demomen. And since dead players respawn, try using your medics and spies to disorient your opponent instead of killing him.

■■■ Warpath is a tough map since you respawn out of the combat zone if your base has been penetrated. Remember: You've got to wait 15 seconds before you can recapture a command point. Make sure you control the first two command points on your side as soon as possible—a loss of either of these can be disastrous.

■■■ Remember that there's a new GUI to use. Access it by pressing V. It's very useful for shouting commands off to your teammates in a short amount of time.

Here's one we discovered while playing against Gabe Newell: The APC on Epicenter (the capture point) can be jumped over. It's a real neat trick to pull on a heavy weapons guy who's standing on the capture point.



■■■ The Pyro is now a useful character. With the new network code, it's easier to light your enemies on fire with his weapons. Whip out that flame thrower and set your opponents ablaze. A good pyro can blind his foes with his flames as well as damage them. It's almost as annoying as being infected by the medic.

WARLORDS BATTLECRY

by Jason Kapalka

WARLORDS BATTLECRY differs from your usual real-time strategy title in a number of regards—such as its persistent RPG-style heroes—but most important, from a tactical perspective, is the usefulness of Conversion.

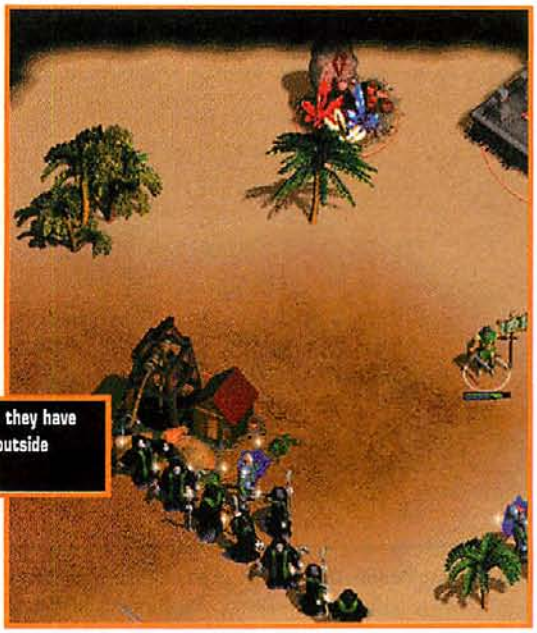
Heroes and select other units cannot only convert neutral mines to their own side, but enemy-owned mines as well. Moreover, they can also convert all enemy buildings except towers. What does this mean? It means that, in many cases, you're better off converting enemy structures instead of simply destroying them. At worst, if you're unable to use your ill-gotten gains, you can hit Ctrl-D to destroy the converted buildings instead of letting your foes nab them back.

Pressing R will show your hero's command radius; all buildings within that radius will be converted after a set period of time, dependent on your hero's Conversion skill. At high levels, this can be as short as five seconds! A speedy or stealthy hero can frequently dodge enemy defenses to convert the heart of a foe's base, or undefended outposts.

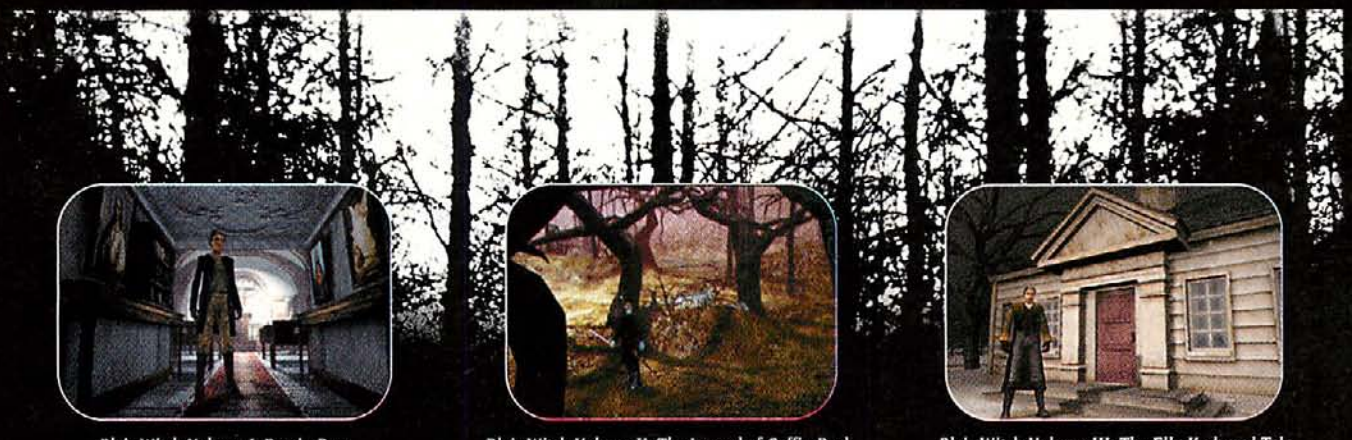
Don't forget that palaces can also convert. Though they take a long time to do so, they have a huge effective radius, meaning that you can often build a cheap level-1 palace just outside your foe's defensive perimeter and still convert his resources and buildings.

Your generals can also convert using your hero's effective level for speed, but unfortunately, their radius is rather small. Use them to convert scattered mines and structures behind your front lines, while your hero focuses on more strategically important areas.

Finally, the Alchemy spell Acquire is even more effective than basic conversion. A fast or invisible hero, with Spell Mastery or Grandmastery increasing Acquire's radius, can infiltrate a base and take it over in mere moments.



HOW TO MAKE FRIENDS AND CONVERT BUILDINGS Tired of ravening for the blood of the living, this thoughtful horde of Undead take a smoke break while their hero converts the enemy base to his own side, via vigorous arm-waving.



Blair Witch Volume I: Rustin Parr
Rustin Parr combines traditional adventure elements such as research, exploration and puzzle-solving with a healthy dose of heart-pounding action to create a frighteningly cerebral gaming experience.

Blair Witch Volume II: The Legend of Coffin Rock
Human Head Studios infuses the power of Nocturne™ technology with Resident Evil-style game play, making The Legend of Coffin Rock a uniquely satisfying romp through hell on Earth.

Blair Witch Volume III: The Elly Kedward Tale
The Elly Kedward Tale focuses on action and will feature a spell-based combat system.

BLAIR WITCH

Gathering of Developers proudly announces a three-game series based on the rich mythology behind the blockbuster film, *The Blair Witch Project*™. Haxan Films has granted unprecedented access to its wealth of intricate folklore, providing developers Terminal Reality, Human Head Studios, and Ritual Entertainment with ample fodder for detailed and compelling storylines. These chilling narratives are powered by the awe-inspiring Nocturne™ engine, creating infinite opportunities for masterful suspense and blood-curdling realism.

TERMINAL REALITY™ humanhead™ ritual entertainment™ RATING PENDING RP CONTENT RATED BY ESRB GATHERING OF DEVELOPERS™

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KISS: PSYCHO CIRCUS

by Jason Babler

■■■ **Stargrave.** This stilt-walker feeds off electricity, so you need to take out the source. Shoot him until he turns on the four generators, then crouch behind the metal protector. Move over slightly and destroy the four generators, then take him out by shooting his shoulder that sticks out. He'll pull down lightning from the sky and power up again. Don't worry; stay crouched, dodge his bolts, and keep firing—until there's nothing left but stilts.



CROUCH OR BE MICROWAVED Stay hidden behind this plate and maybe you'll survive this stilt-walking monstrosity.

■■■ **RingMaster.** The mad leader of the circus is the last level boss you have to take out as The Demon. He zaps around from platform to platform, breathing fireballs, summoning lava spitters, and even duplicating himself, forcing you to gun down the doppelgangers. Stay out of the lava, keep Draco (your ultimate weapon) spewing fire on him, and you'll be able to take him down in one try.

■■■ **Fortuna.** Take out the exploding barrels first, then focus on this bowling-pin-tossing clown. Circle-strafe and pummel him with the weapon of your choice. He grows in size after each "death" and his bowling pins get more dangerous to dodge. Strafe, shoot, and repeat until he goes down.

■■■ **Tiberius.** The animal trainer has been turned into a giant minotaur with an affinity towards goring you into the spikes. If you stay on the ground, Tiberius breaks open boxes of stumps and headless to plague you. Grapple up to the trapeze net for power-ups and ammo while dodging his whip and headbutts. A few well-placed Spirit Lances will put his head over your fireplace.

■■■ **Final Boss: The Nightmare Child.** You pick which elder to start with in a huge, eye-covered cavern. Take out the eyes while dodging their lasers. Before you shoot the last eyeball, make sure you're powered up with ammo. Health can be found in the portals on either side of the cavern. The Nightmare Child will throw a fit and burst out of his womb. I kept Draco raining down a mouthful of lava and grabbing health until I beat the little brat. But you're not done yet: His head sprouts legs and comes after you again. Just keep firing away, and soon, you'll put junior to bed for good.

EVERQUEST RUINS OF KUNARK

—Alex Handy

Here're some hints and tips for your Iskar character.

■■■ You'll be starting in Cabilis, so get to know the town. Remember that you can swim like a fish, and often the quickest way to get from one area of Cabilis to another will be through the water.

■■■ Directly outside of Cabilis are some excellent hunting grounds. The Field of Bone is always full of scorpions, Scaled Wolf pups, and emerald scarabs. These make great fodder for early characters, but you'll want to cut your teeth on the giant mosquitoes and leeches in the Swamp of No Hope, at least until you reach level 3.

■■■ The Lake of Ill Omen is probably the best-all-around place to hunt. You'll be encountering some mean goblin variants, so be prepared to run at the sight of a shamen. Unfortunately, this tends to be the least populated area around Cabilis, so you'd do well to bring a friend along in case you get jumped.



■■■ The merchants outside of Cabilis are a bit harder to find than in most other towns, but rest assured they are there. Wander through the ruined buildings for a while to find them.

■■■ As always, Shamen and Necromancers are going to have a tough go of it without some help early on. The pit area in the Field of Bone is an excellent place to team up with some level 5 through 10 characters. They'll probably appreciate the help of a Healer or Skeleton when taking down the big game.

■■■ Be wary of Scaled Wolves. The pups are some of the easiest monsters around, but their older cousins are infinitely more ferocious. Avoid regular Scaled Wolves like the plague; they're slightly bigger than the pups, but it can be hard to tell them apart.

Friends come and go, but Family is for life.



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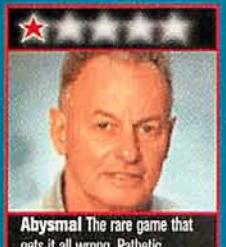
Very Good Worthy of your time and money, but there are drawbacks.



Average Either an ambitious design with major flaws, or just vanilla.



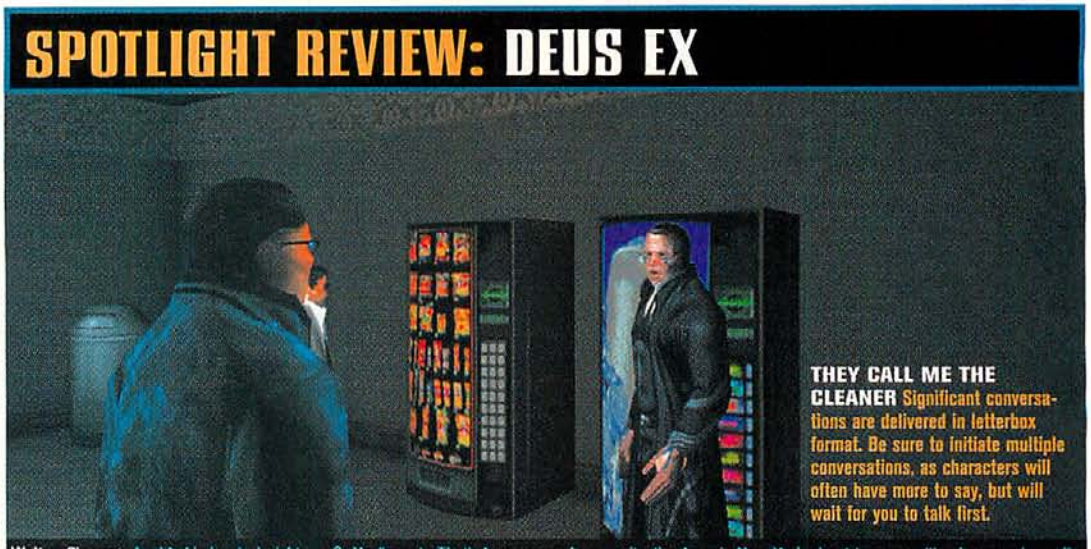
Weak Seriously lacking in play value, poorly conceived, or just another clone.



Abysmal The rare game that gets it all wrong. Pathetic. Coaster material.

We review only finished games– no betas, no patches.

SPOTLIGHT REVIEW: DEUS EX



THEY CALL ME THE CLEANER Significant conversations are delivered in letterbox format. Be sure to initiate multiple conversations, as characters will often have more to say, but will wait for you to talk first.

Walton Simons: Am I behind a desk right now? No, I'm not. That's because we have a situation here in New York. I got to my position because I can fix things. You will see shortly, because as you have probably noticed yourself this agency is broken and needs an overhaul.

DEUS EX weaves a Matrix of action, roleplaying, and paranoia

They're Out to Get Me

ACTION / RPG

reviewed by Thierry Nguyen

Ion Storm knows you're reading this review. Every copy of this issue has been "flagged" because of the DEUS EX review. Subscribers have already been added to a central ION Storm database, and if you bought this at a store, the UPC code that the cashier scanned gave you away. When you arrived at this page, microscopic nanites beamed a signal to Austin, alerting ION to the fact that you're reading it. Your phones are now being tapped, all of your e-mail will be copied and stored, and a satellite is probably watching your house right now.

That's the kind of over-the-top, conspiratorial paranoia that DEUS EX delivers. Additionally, the game delivers moments of brilliance, idiocy, ingenuity, and frustration. It is also the kind of game that makes me hate review ratings, but I'll get to that later.

CGW RATED

PROS

A conspiracy yarn that lets you play the way you want to.

CONS

A stuttering frame-rate, goofy gameworld logic, and idiotic AI.

Shot, Waterback

DEUS EX is a tale about one man making a difference in a complex world. You're a nanotechnology-enhanced agent (think of the characters in Neal Stephenson's The Diamond Age), working for an anti-terrorism agency called UNATCO. It's sometime around 2050, and the Gray Death is saturating the nation. At first, you're just fighting off a secessionist force called the NSF and securing the only known cure for Gray Death. But – as in many conspiracy yarns – everything turns topsy-turvy, as connections between the Hong Kong Triads, the Illuminati, Area 51, FEMA, and the Echelon Network become apparent. Like an *X-Files* season on overdrive, or the unexpurgated works of Umberto Eco, the sheer volume of people, organizations, and the secret connections between them, borders on the absurd.

Trapped within this massive web of ideas is a huge cast of characters. You'll fight against or alongside French revolutionaries, Men-In-Black, Cybernetic Death Squads, Triad gangsters, renegade scientists, and giant robots. This humongous cast is entirely voiced. Most of the time, the voice-acting is just passable, though for every questionable choice (the accents of the people in Hong Kong), there's a brilliant casting choice to equalize it (for example, Tom Hall, as one of the best villains in a game this year).

Day, Hour, Minute...Man

Being an RPG at heart, DEUS EX is centered on character development. You define yourself in three ways: by your skills, your augmentations, and your inventory. Like FALLOUT, there's a list of skills such as "Lockpicking" and "Rifles," with proficiencies ranging

Requirements: Pentium-II 300MHz, 64MB RAM, 150MB hard drive space, 4x CD-ROM, DirectX-compatible video and sound card, mouse. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-III, 128MB RAM, 750MB hard drive space, 8x CD-ROM.
3D Support: Direct3D **Multiplayer Support:** None

Publisher: Eidos • Developer: ION Storm Austin • $40 • www.ionstorm.com
ESRB Rating: Mature (17+); animated blood and violence.



THE WORLD WITHIN MY GRASP The UNREAL engine makes for nice areas like this, at the expense of frame-rate for D3D users.

between "Untrained" and "Master." By the end of the game, you'll have only mastered about two skills, and the rest will be mostly "untrained," with a few "advanced" here and there. Your skill choices will determine your primary play-style in the game.

Next come Nano-Augmentations, which are essentially super-hero powers hiding behind a pseudo-scientific mask. Every time you get a nano-augmentation, you're offered two choices but can only keep one – choices such as "Telescopic Vision With Targeting Info" versus "Seeing Through Walls," or "Run Insanely Fast" versus "Move Stealthily Like a Ninja." You can upgrade each augmentation, but the upgrade canisters are few and far between.

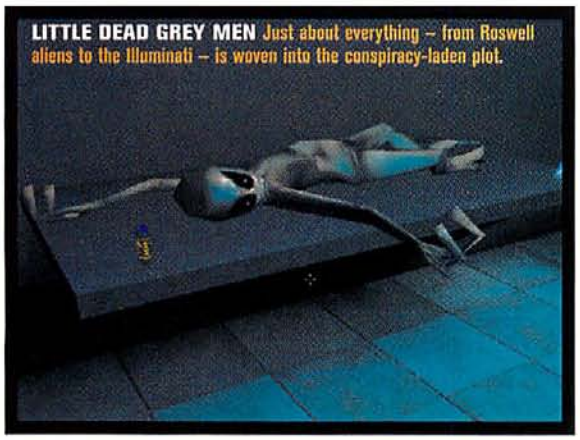
Finally, you have your backpack, which provides a fixed amount of inventory space. If you want to be Arnold-incarnate, all those guns will hog the space that could be used for stealth items like lockpicks or thermoptic camouflage armor. Consequently, all of that miscellaneous equipment takes up space that, say, a Plasma Rifle could use. Alas, like every RPG before it, inventory management is pure hell. This game, like others, screams for an auto-arranger for your inventory.

Parlez Kung Vous?

A quick way to describe the game is to call it the love child of HALF-LIFE and SYSTEM SHOCK, with some THIEF thrown in for good measure. The core gameplay can be boiled down to one word: choices. A typical snippet of DEUS EX gameplay:

Four soldiers, a camera, and a turret are guarding a door. You have: a sniper rifle, an assault rifle, a grenade, some lockpicks, and some packets of soy food. What do you do?

You could: a) Snipe the four soldiers, than use the grenade to blow the door open, b) Find the air ventilation shaft and completely sneak



LITTLE DEAD GREY MEN Just about everything – from Roswell aliens to the Illuminati – is woven into the conspiracy-laden plot.

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

Any discussion of freakishly hairy, blood-spewing men in towering platform boots is going to struggle to maintain anything like an earthbound sense of proportion. —*Jason Babler, reviewing KISS: PSYCHO CIRCUS*

This Is Not Your Father's Cliche

By Tom Price

With all the creative talent in the computer gaming industry, you'd think we could find someone to write a backstory that's above the level of B-movie hackwork. Yes, some games are built on great stories, but the vast majority have the same cookie-cutter plots. Are all game developers working from the same Mad Libs book? If we see the following themes one more time, we're going to go post-apocalyptic on someone's ass:

Post-Apocalyptic Settings: What, nothing interesting ever happened before the apocalypse? C'mon fellas, the cold war is over, and while that doesn't mean the Big One is an impossibility, it doesn't rattle our subconscious like it used to.

Alien Artifacts: Look, if someone found alien artifacts on another planet, the odds are slim that it would be some superweapon that would help them wipe out their oppressive corporate overlords. Most likely, they would find the discarded wrapper of some otherworldy snack cake or a dirty alien diaper.

Rag-Tag Bands of Freedom Fighters: We've seen the Seven Samurai. Get over it.

Crates: Yes, we know crates are probably very easy from a programming standpoint, but we are so sick of breaking them open and moving them around to create steps, that we're this close to adopting Old Man Murray's CrateMaster compatibility test for our reviews.

Write to me at tom_price@ziffdavis.com with your biggest game cliche peeve. I'll be here with my ragtag band of crate-busting, freedom-fighting editors, preparing for the last ditch assault on our evil corporate masters.

OCTOBER REVIEWS

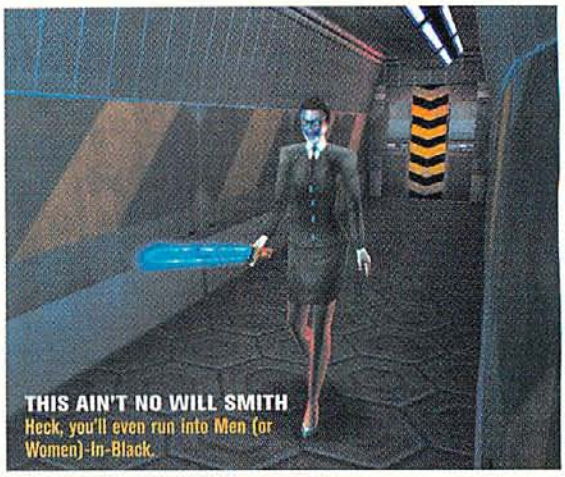
GAME	RATING
Backyard Baseball 2001	★★★★★
Beachhead 2000	★★★★★
Dark Reign 2	★★★★★
Deus Ex	★★★★★
Enemy Engaged: Comanche vs. Hokum	★★★★★
F1 World Grand Prix	★★★★★
Icewind Dale	★★★★½
KISS: Psycho Circus	★★★★★
Panzer Campaigns: Normandy '44	★★★★★
Star Trek Conquest Online	★★★★★
Start-Up 2000	★★★★★
Warlords Battlecry	★★★★★

past them, or c) Throw the soy food to distract the four goons, and either pick the lock, or use a nearby security terminal to have the turret shoot the four dopey vegans when they return.

These choices are ultimately what make the game so fun. Each of the roughly 15 missions has a set goal, but you can achieve that goal however you want. You gain skill points by getting to certain areas or fulfilling duties, not by killing people. Each level is designed with enough malleable items and passages for flexibility in accomplishing most goals.

The concept of choice and flexibility is so inherent in the game design that the endgame, too, depends on your choice. Upon reaching the end, you're given three different tasks, all of which are extensions of three different ideologies; it's up to the player to determine which of these ideals will be followed, and hence, which ending will be seen.

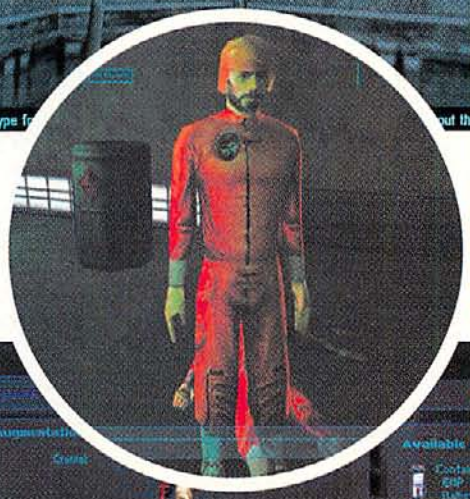
No matter how you approach a scenario, you'll need to get into some combat. While the designers claim you can play this like a shooter, it's just not feasible. With the limited ammunition, and the RAINBOW SIX accuracy model (standing still means a guaranteed shot; moving around severely diminishes accuracy), you have to be careful with your shots. Like SYSTEM SHOCK, it's neither a pure shooter nor a pure RPG, but one of those pesky hybrids.



THIS AIN'T NO WILL SMITH Heck, you'll even run into Men (or Women)-In-Black.



UNTIL YOU'RE BLUE IN THE FACE Meeting the various AIs in the game may make you more careful about what you write in your e-mail.



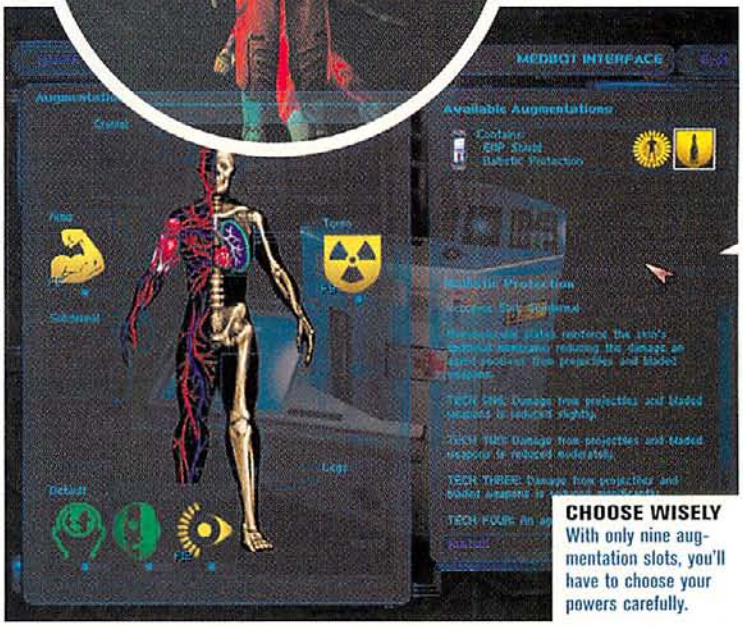
SOMETHING FISHY HERE Little moments such as encountering this "odd mechanic" show off the flexibility of the design; what you do to this fellow will determine whether or not a certain person lives or dies later on.

The Right Ear Left in the Cold

If you're the sort to look at ratings first, you can tell that the game has some major flaws. The most obvious one is graphics. This game uses the Unreal engine with some enhancements from UNREAL TOURNAMENT. Direct3D support isn't one of those enhancements. The game runs much, much smoother in Glide, and even on a Pentium-III/733 with a GeForce 2 card, it can severely chop down the frame-rate. The frame-rate cut is severe enough to hamper things such as, oh, aiming your gun or dodging a bullet. Gamers using Direct3D are encouraged to either turn off "Detail Textures" (it adds things like gradations in wooden floors; the performance increase more than makes up for the subtle difference in image quality), or to use the beta Direct3D patch that was released at press time.

Also, the AI is extremely inconsistent. Your enemies are either psychic geniuses or absolute idiots. No matter what, if you shoot but do not kill an enemy, they will *always* know where you are. Yet I've managed to kill a guard, while his buddy four feet away didn't notice. Occasionally, the AI flirts with brilliance, such as actually noticing dead bodies or comrades falling down, but overall, it tends to gravitate toward the extremes I've described.

Finally, there are the little problems that may test the gamer's suspension of disbelief. In the name of gameplay, there are crates all over the place – crates that you need to smash open. Ammunition is extremely limited, oddly – the government spends billions to train you, but never gives you enough supplies. The enemy almost always has only four bullets when you scavenge their equipment, and people sell clips of sniper ammunition for seven hundred dollars. You get scolded for killing people in cold blood or walking into the women's restroom, but you can throw potted plants at people's heads or hack into their computers right in front of them, and get only a verbal reprieve. Last time I



CHOOSE WISELY With only nine augmentation slots, you'll have to choose your powers carefully.

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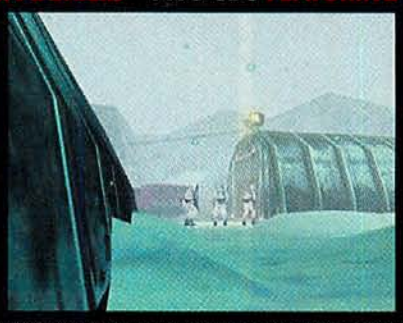
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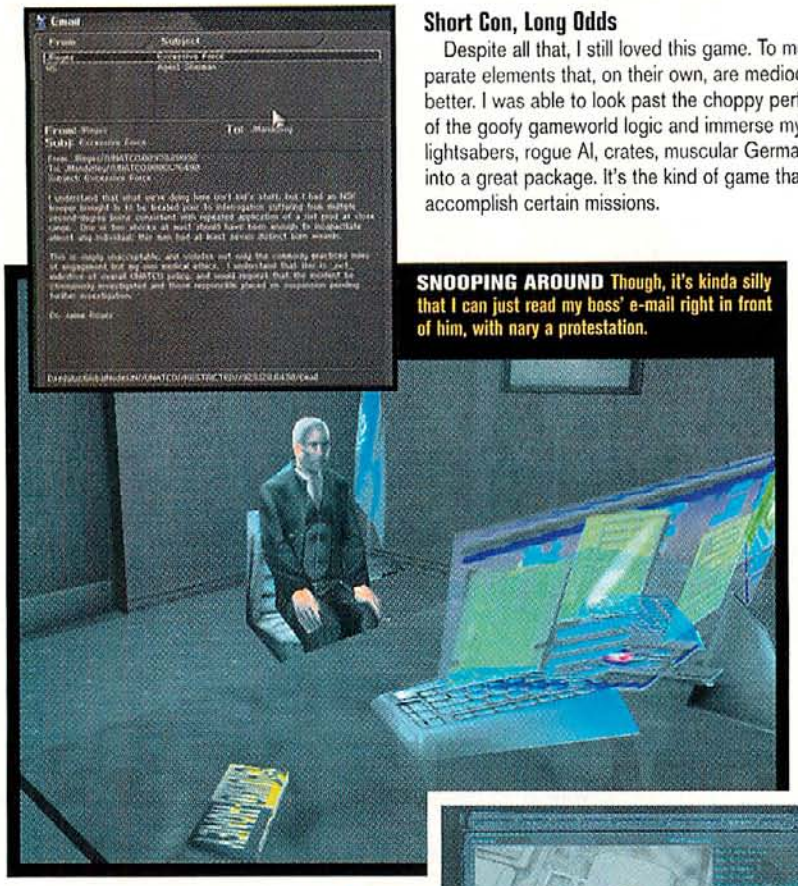
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checked, trying to read my boss' e-mail after throwing a chair at him would result in his firing me on the spot, if not his calling the security goons.

Short Con, Long Odds

Despite all that, I still loved this game. To me, it's like *The Matrix*; it pulls together many disparate elements that, on their own, are mediocre, but they manage to add up to something better. I was able to look past the choppy performance, the mental lapses of the AI, and some of the goofy gameworld logic and immerse myself completely. Yes, it's a game featuring lightsabers, rogue AI, crates, muscular Germans, and other clichés, but it pulls them together into a great package. It's the kind of game that inspires players to tell stories about how they accomplish certain missions.

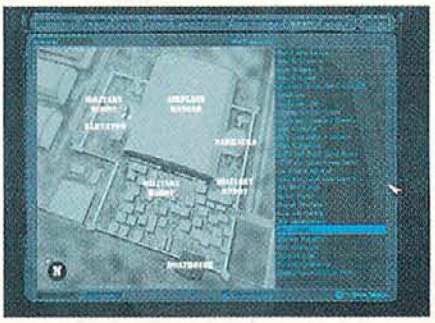
So while I love the game and see it as Game Of The Year material, I can't, in good conscience, give it the Almighty Score. It has deep flaws that sometimes frustrated me, as they detracted from its ambitious design. I realize that not everyone will be as tolerant as I am about its flaws. Nevertheless, DEUS EX is ultimately a game-well-done, and if you look past its flaws, it's a fine ride. CGW



SNOOPING AROUND Though, it's kinda silly that I can just read my boss' e-mail right in front of him, with nary a protestation.



I GOT MAD SKILLZ With a limited number of skill points, you'll have to either specialize or be a jack-of-all-trades.



YOU ARE HERE While there is no in-game automap, most of the layouts make sense, and you're occasionally given rough maps such as this one.

PSYCHIC KILL Even though I was pretty well concealed, the fact that I missed meant that everyone was magically alerted to my exact spot.

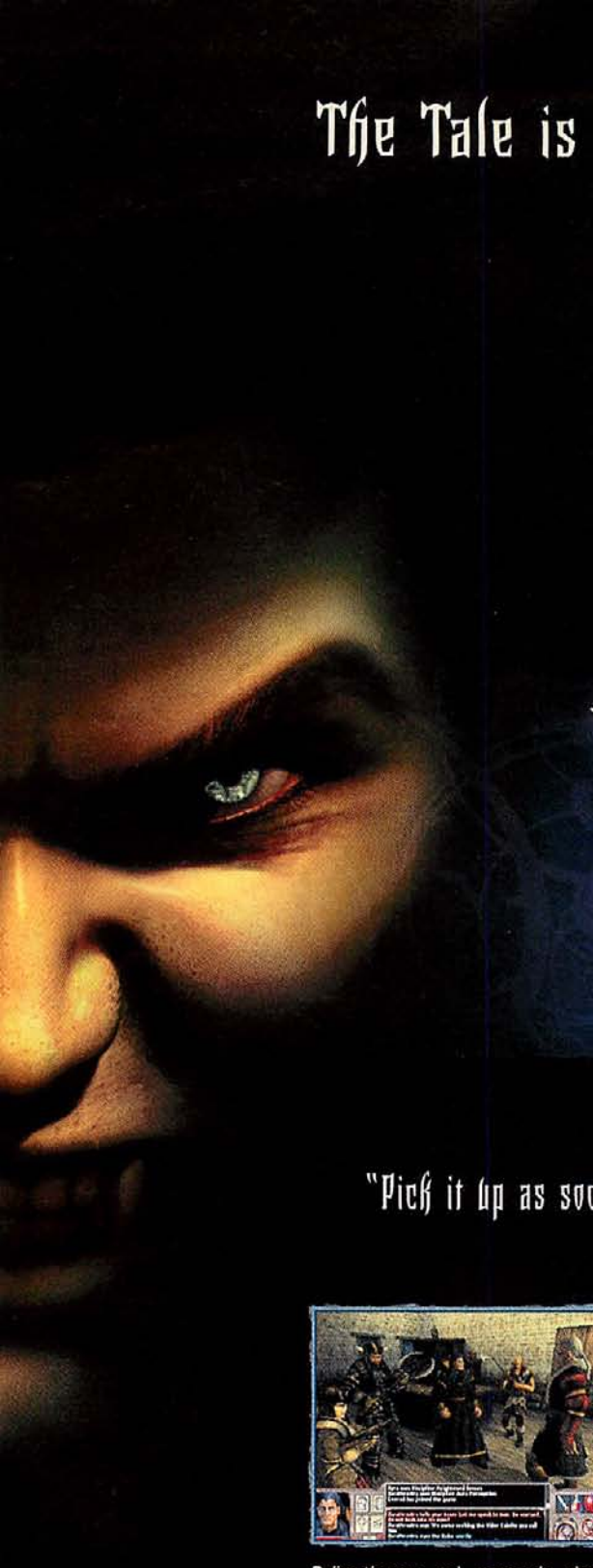


COPS 'R' US A severe hole in the AI makes for a cop who doesn't notice his dead partner's corpse three feet away.



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"...a fun, evolving game that keeps us screaming for the next chapter." - Karil

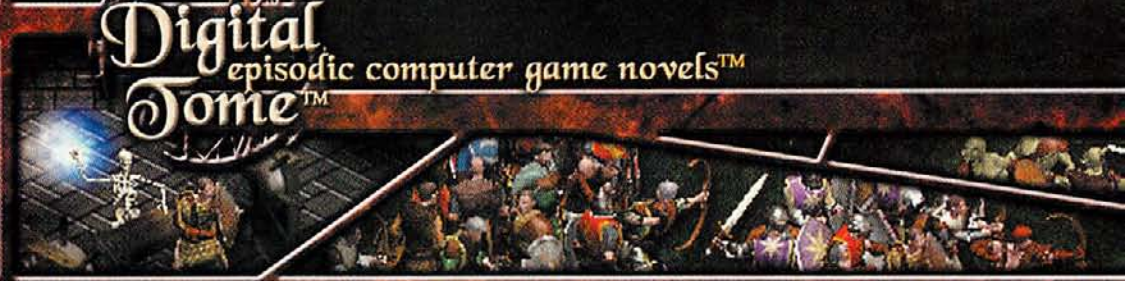
"This company has got a hit." - Kagi

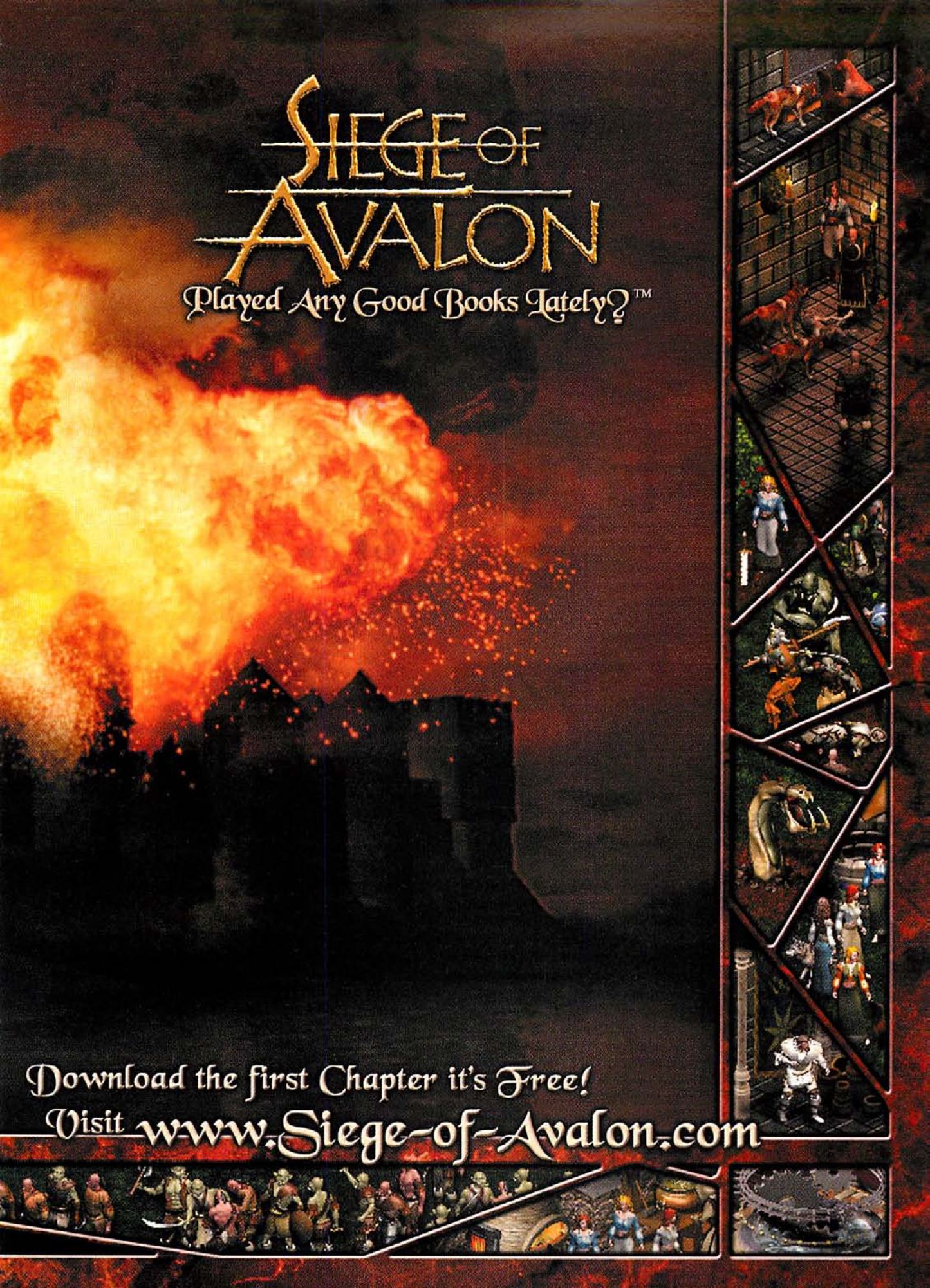
"The Layered Sprites (characters) are the best I've seen." - Cygoth

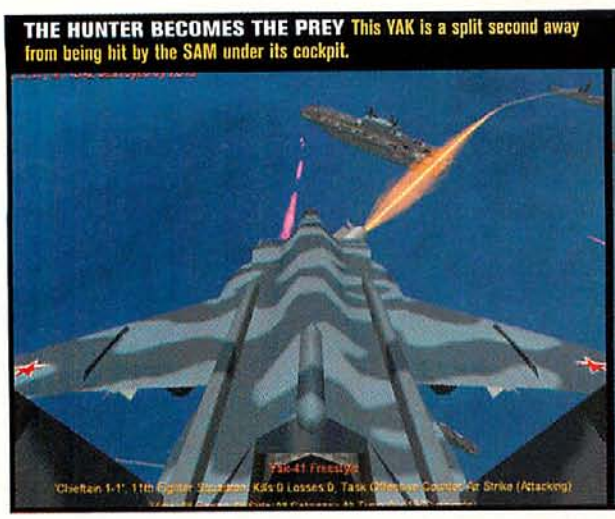
"The game truly shows the dedication the team has put forward for us." - Cronos



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THE HUNTER BECOMES THE PREY This YAK is a split second away from being hit by the SAM under its cockpit.



ANCHORS AWEIGH Some campaigns will have your aircraft based on helicopter carriers.

Razorworks delivers the best chopper sim ever

Gone to Chopper Heaven

Wither flight sims. Or so the industry punditocracy would have us believe. Well, don't tell that to Empire Interactive and Razorworks, who have just delivered what is clearly the best-overall helicopter sim of all time, and one of the best flight sims ever to grace a PC – ENEMY ENGAGED: RAH 64 COMANCHE VERSUS KA-52 HOKUM.

ENEMY ENGAGED: RAH 64 COMANCHE VERSUS KA-52 HOKUM

reviewed by Jeff Lackey

CGW RATED

PROS

The best chopper sim ever, with three wonderfully hyperactive campaigns, very good flight dynamics, and all the little touches that make a game great.

CONS

No pilot/CP/G co-op mode; trees are still large blocks of solid terrain; inability to remap key commands.

Rotors Engaged

Simulation designers have to tread a fine line between making a game so hardcore it discourages casual gamers, and "dumbing down" the sim to the point of inspiring derision amongst serious simmers. Razorworks has done a masterful job of blurring the lines; the resulting product has great appeal to both camps. On the simulation side, COMANCHE offers two state of the art combat helicopters: the U.S. RAH 64 Comanche, and the Russian Ka-52 Hokum. While you won't be able to jump into the real thing and fly it after a few hours with COMANCHE, the flight physics and avionics are good enough to please the average sim fanatic.

Flight physics unique to high-performance helicopters – such as retreating blade stall and vortex ring effects (a particularly deadly situation in which you lose all lift) – are included and have a significant effect on your chopper. These can be toggled off, a convenience for less experienced pilots. Cross-coupling of your tail rotors to your cyclic can also be toggled on or off (for an advanced chopper such as the Comanche, it may be more realistic to leave it on). There are easily discernable differences in the flight characteristics of the Comanche and the Hokum, in particular the unique handling of the dual-rotor Hokum – which allows maneuvers not easily achieved in any other helicopter. If there is any complaint in this area, it may be that the differences in handling of the two aircraft aren't as *completely* different as one might expect from reading open sources on these choppers. But this is just speculation, and not a significant issue.

Avionics are simplified, but still realistic enough to please a hardcore simmer. Air and ground radar is presented identically on both helicopters, easing the learning curve when jumping between aircraft. Both radar types do a fairly realistic job, e.g., terrain blocking and cluttering effects are represented. Filters are available to assist in prioritization of threats, and you can adjust sweep rates and range to suit your situation. Optical-target recognition modes are also simulated, such as FLIR, DTV, and the Russian periscope. While it's tempting to simply rely on the radar, there are situations in which the optical equipment is preferred – such as seeking out that annoying soldier with the shoulder-mounted SAM, or when stealth is required. One problem with employing the FLIR modes of targeting is the need for a stable hover in order to maintain a visual lock. This would be easier if your CP/G would assist you in seeking out and locking on targets with the optical modes, but your partner is fairly passive and requires you to lock on and fire the weapons. Overall, COMANCHE presents a nice compromise of avionics, presenting the spirit of realism without requiring night courses in engineering and physics to effectively use them.

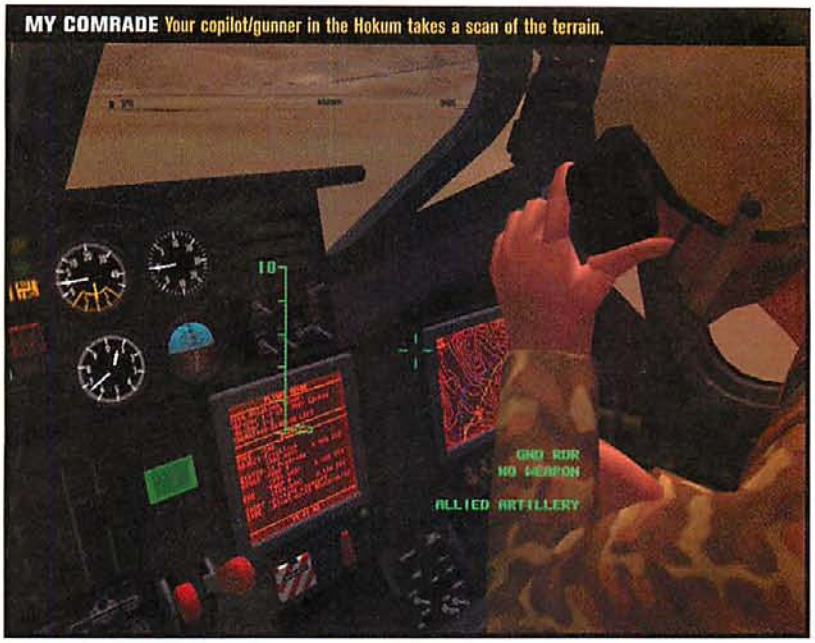
Requirements: Pentium 266MHz or K6-2 300 MHz, 64 MB RAM, DirectX-supported D3D graphics card with 4 MB memory. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-II 300MHz or K6-2 400 MHz, 128 MB RAM. **3D Support:** Direct3D **Multiplayer Support:** Network/Internet (1 CD per player); IPX or TCP/IP network; modem, serial link, serial cable.

Publisher: Empire Interactive • Developer: Razorworks • $40 • www.enemyengaged.com • ESRB Rating: Everyone

Campaigns to Die For

A combat flight sim is made or broken by the campaign world in which you fight. To summarize the campaign environment of COMANCHE in professional-writer terms: Boo-ya! This is arguably the best dynamic war engine in the genre (go ahead and gnash your teeth, FALCON 4 fanatics – it's all that and more.) Three campaign scenarios are offered, located in Taiwan, Lebanon, and Saudi Arabia/Yemen, all playable from both sides of the conflict. If you already have ENEMY ENGAGED: APACHE VERSUS HAVOC installed (and the latest patch applied), COMANCHE will automatically merge the two programs, resulting in those three campaigns and choppers also being available. Graphics are very good and gameplay is smooth. One disappointment is that trees are still represented as solid blocks of hedge-like terrain, so there's no hiding behind individual trees.

MY COMRADE Your copilot/gunner in the Hokum takes a scan of the terrain.



If you never played COMANCHE's predecessor, be prepared to be blown away by the level of concentrated activity in these virtual wars. Unlike most flight sim campaigns, these are not at all player-centric. There's a war going on all around you, with missions being generated and assigned, whether you jump in or not. Razorworks has accomplished a true breakthrough here by creating wars in which you are a small player in the big picture, yet allowing you to make a significant impact on the progress of the campaign. On the mission-preparation screen, you can observe the progress of the war, see where the critical battles are occurring, and then choose a mission in which to fly. Mission types include everything from escort and transfer to close air support, battlefield interdiction, and suppression of enemy air defenses (SEAD).

A ROOM WITH A VIEW The heads-down view in the Comanche cockpit.



Decisions, Decisions...

Have you ever played a flight sim in which, if you wandered off of your assigned mission path, the world at war turned oddly serene? No chance of that here: This is a highly populated, fully-fledged battlefield. As you traverse to your assigned target, you will observe many of the thousands of units that are fighting their own part of the war. Radio calls will flood your ears with status reports, mission updates, desperate calls for assistance, and more. Nothing is prescripted, as the campaign engine enables units to react to their surroundings and circumstances to provide a dynamic campaign in the truest sense of the word. Accordingly, you are required to make on-the-spot decisions: Do you relentlessly continue towards the air defenses you are tasked to take out, or do you divert and go to the assistance of the tank column under heavy attack? Assets are limited; do you take your slightly wounded bird directly home for repair after a successful mission, or do you swing wide to expend your remaining missiles on that pesky SAM site that keeps knocking your compatriots down?

Every time you go into the air you're faced with such decisions, and it creates an atmosphere of tension and unpredictability that keeps you coming back for "one more mission." To get a real feel for the world that Razorworks has created, hit the F11 key. It will continuously switch between all of the active units on the map, revealing how much detail is involved in this environment. SAM vehicles turn and fire; cargo planes drop their supplies; aircraft pop flares and chaff; and much, much more.

The biggest problem in COMANCHE's predecessor, APACHE VERSUS HAVOC, was the lack of control over your wingmen. They would fly off on their own, following some misbegotten logic that made them less than useful. Thankfully, that has been fixed in spades, with all the wingman commands you could ask for. Not only that, your computer pilots are smart enough to seek protected firing positions on their own. This improved logic is used in the old campaigns from APACHE VERSUS HAVOC if you integrate it into COMANCHE.

Cleared for Landing

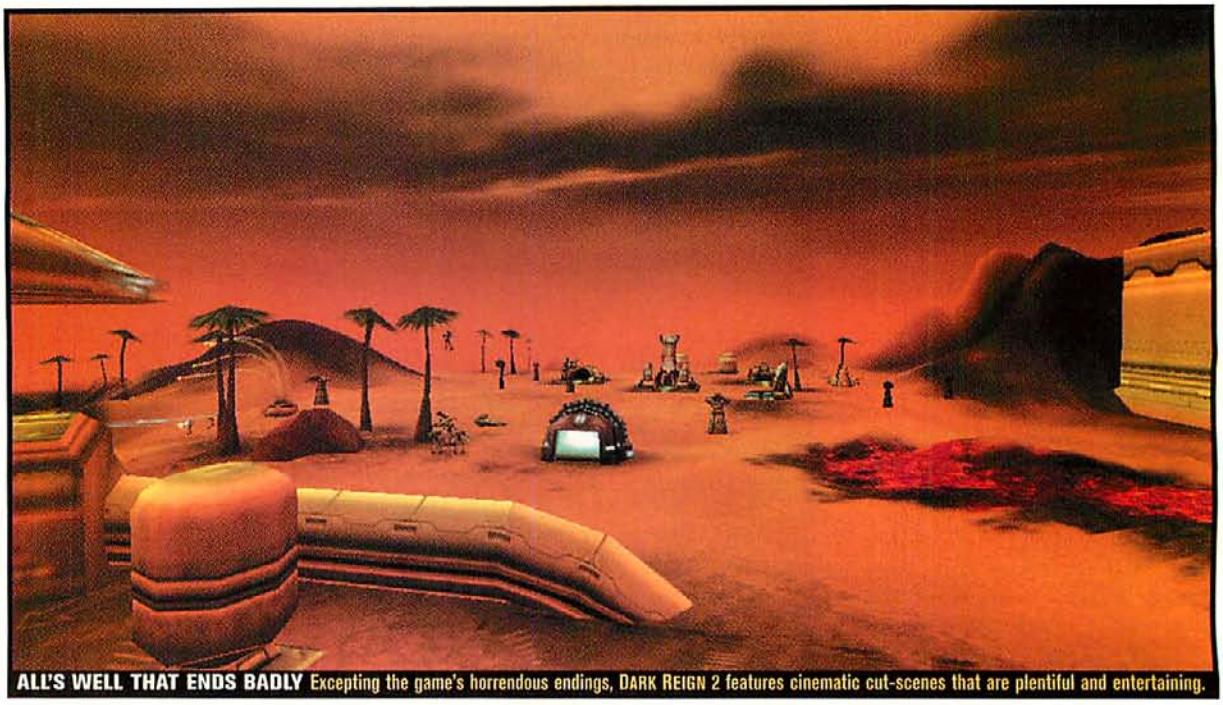
While there are a few minor issues, there are far more things that COMANCHE gets right than can be covered here. This is a great sim and a great game, providing heaps of excitement, tension, drama, and just flat-out fun. It's highly recommended, for everyone from hardcore sim fanatics to sim newbies looking for a sustained jolt of entertainment. CGW

Cool Links

www.razorworks.com/chguide/ An updated strategy guide that goes a step beyond the manual.

ch-central.frugalsworld.com/main.htm Frugal's excellent Comanche Hokum Central site.

www.longbow.cwc.net/utilities/EE_GSS_18.ZIP A great utility for EECH by Flexman.



ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS BADLY Excepting the game's horrendous endings, DARK REIGN 2 features cinematic cut-scenes that are plentiful and entertaining.

DARK REIGN 2 grabs the eye, but not the imagination

Reign of the Same

DARK REIGN 2 presents a paradox. On the surface, this title does everything right. But disturbingly, its ho-hum reception by the gaming public indicates a certain numbness among real-time strategy game fans. Three years ago, Activision and designer Pandemic's offering would have been an instant classic. Now, it's just another RTS.

What gives? For starters, the fundamentals of the genre just haven't advanced much over the last four years. Amass a huge force of troops, and send them in. Continually crash units against the enemy, until you win. In the single-player game, brute force missions have always been balanced by small squad, tactical mini-missions that, though smaller in scale, still require a critical core of offensive firepower.

Despite the familiar turf, DARK REIGN 2 actually succeeds on the RTS front. In fact, it may be the best-looking game in the category. And the frequent letter-boxed cut-scenes, while occasionally flawed and incomplete, add the kind of atmosphere and plot twists not usually present in this kind of game.

Unfortunately, the gameplay – while varied and enjoyable – is entirely too typical. And these days, typical just doesn't cut it.

DARK REIGN 2
reviewed by George Jones

CGW RATED



PROS
Splendid graphics, lots of cut-scenes, and well-balanced play make DARK REIGN 2 a prime representative of the RTS game-style.

CONS
The standard RTS game-style is getting stale.

A Noble Attempt

DARK REIGN 2's designers do make some extraordinary attempts to elevate the game's atmosphere above the typical real-time strategy fare. They've included tons of cut-scenes – rendered in-engine and frequently mid-mission – that advance the game's far-flung future plot, which centers on a battle between the Sprawlers (a rebel faction) and the authority-type JDA faction.

Unfortunately, like most other PC games, the story simply serves as a line to connect the dots between the two separate campaigns. Even when the plot twists, the game just puts its head down and keeps moving forward in the most linear direction possible. As a consequence, the game loses dramatic impact. Had the missions been more tightly interwoven, DARK REIGN 2 could have been far more visceral.

At one point in the JDA campaign, a super-powerful unit called the Juggernaut demolishes your forces. If you play the Sprawler campaign first, you'll know that the Sprawlers actually captured this weapon from the JDA. Play JDA first, and you have no idea your own weapon is being used against you. At another point, you have to murder a group of traitorous senators; unfortunately, there's no explanation as to their motives. That's too bad, as this kind of table-turning makes for dramatic moments.

It's also too bad that the designers weren't able to create a mission structure that bypassed convention, switched between the two sides on the fly, and allowed you to get more emotionally involved with one of the factions – maybe even to choose one side for the game's final battle. In the original game, you could at least play all the missions from both sides' perspectives.

A bigger problem lies within the game's ending. With 20 missions

Requirements: Pentium-II 233MHz, 32MB RAM, 650MB hard drive space, 3D card. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-II 300MHz, 64MB RAM.
3D Support: Direct-X compatible 3D card required. **Multiplayer Support:** 2-8 players over IPX and TCP/IP; one CD per player.

Publisher: Activision • Developer: Pandemic • $50 • www.activision.com • ESRB Rating: Teen; animated blood and violence.

FORGOTTEN REALMS

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total – ten on each side – DARK REIGN 2 is a long, hard-fought game. And when you get to the end, your rewards are minimal. At the end of the Sprawler campaign, you send a highly destructible Juggernaut through a portal to destroy the JDA. You kill yourself to accomplish this task, and barely get the Juggernaut through intact. But you don't get to see the explosive payoff. You're simply told that you've succeeded, and the next thing you see is your units moving through the portal into a new world. Very disappointing.

It's not that DARK REIGN 2's linear approach is an outright failure. The game actually goes farther than any other game in its story-telling devices. But it could have been so much more. At its best, this game is capable of providing some great surprises. In one tense moment in the JDA campaign, you approach a powerful artifact in a hallway occupied by two huge, unmoving, monstrous creatures. As soon as you take control of the artifact, the two beasts pounce, ripping your forces to shreds. It's a great moment in the game and it illustrates the future potential of the entire genre.

But as a Game...

Ironically, DARK REIGN excels when judged within the cozy confines of real-time strategy gaming. The game's 3D graphics don't complicate the action. You can play it in the ideal fashion: as if it were a 2D game with 3D graphics. There's no need to swivel your perspective to be more effective, since the game camera adjusts itself to the appropriate height.

In fact, it seemed like pivoting the camera around only made things more difficult, as it was too easy to lose the north-south orientation you'll need. You might wish that you could zoom in and out a little bit more; thankfully, there are patches available that let you do this at **www.darkreign2.net**.

The mission types consist of the usual mix – all-out battles interspersed with smaller, more tactical missions – the kind where losing too many units means failure. One nice touch is the number of timed missions in the game. In one such level, you have to ensure that nine out of twelve scout ships land safely at your base, which means you have to go on the offensive, taking out a series of anti-air installations before they destroy four of your craft. In another, you have only 30 minutes to assassinate a leader before he makes his escape into the mountains.

Mine!

One major frustration is how the game uses mines to impede your progress. These are the DARK REIGN 2 equivalent of the jumping or maze puzzles in action or adventure games; every single level, it seems, is filled with mines capable of taking out your meticulously-placed armies in one blast.

While it's true that the mine-detecting units on each side can discover these mines, their presence seriously erodes the pacing of the game. Complicating the problem, the units' pathfinding AI usually results in your minesweeper getting stuck at the back of the pack. So, you have to send off your mine detector with a small squadron – in which case, if they run into the enemy, you're cooked. Or you have to send them with a big squadron, where units still tend to run into detected mines. A nice solution would have been to abstract the destruction of mines in such a way that when units detect them, they're automatically destroyed.

Another frustration is that the game's formations don't really work. By holding down the V, B, or N keys, you can move your units into a formation. This helps during a firefight, but the units don't stay in formation when they're moving. Too many times, units get picked off attacking a mounted defense simply because you can't get them to show up on time together.

Few of My Favorite Things

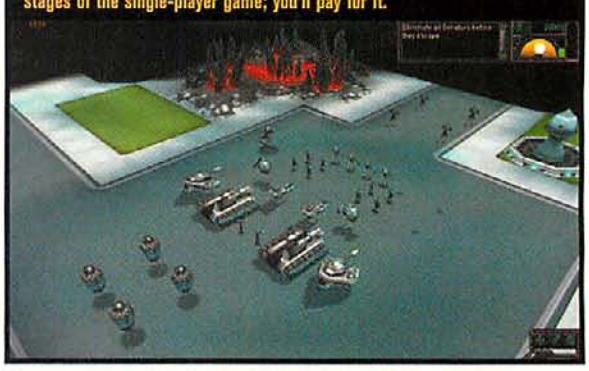
These problems are nothing out of the ordinary. In fact, DARK REIGN 2 suffers from fewer of these kinds of glitches and annoyances that RTS gamers have come to expect. And the elegant interface really makes commanding and constructing your forces simple.



TAKE 'EM OUT No matter what setting – jungle, urban, or alien – DARK REIGN's graphics are the best ever for an RTS game.



IF IT MAKES YOU HAPPY... The same rules apply – build up a massive army and rush the enemy to win.



IN THE BEGINNING From this point, you'll build a massive – albeit temporary – empire. Be careful not to scout around too far in the early stages of the single-player game; you'll pay for it.

Even the game's multiplayer options – which present several different types of games – are solid. It's still interesting that even three years later, no one has come up with a more open-ended, AGE OF EMPIRES approach to multiplayer.

But somehow, DARK REIGN 2 is less than the sum of its highly-evolved parts. What is probably one of the finest real-time strategy games ever released feels typical and uninspired. This is probably the only time *Computer Gaming World* will ever (we hope) quote Huey Lewis, but we need a new drug. One capable of recapturing the manic fervor even mediocre real-time strategy games used to inspire. CGW

"Think of Sea Dogs as Pirates! in 3D but with more depth to it... Sea Dogs simply looks great."
Gamers Central

"...combines the extremely addictive gameplay of both Daggerfall and the old Sid Meier classic, Pirates!"
FiringSquad









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And so is the fun.





Sea Dogs

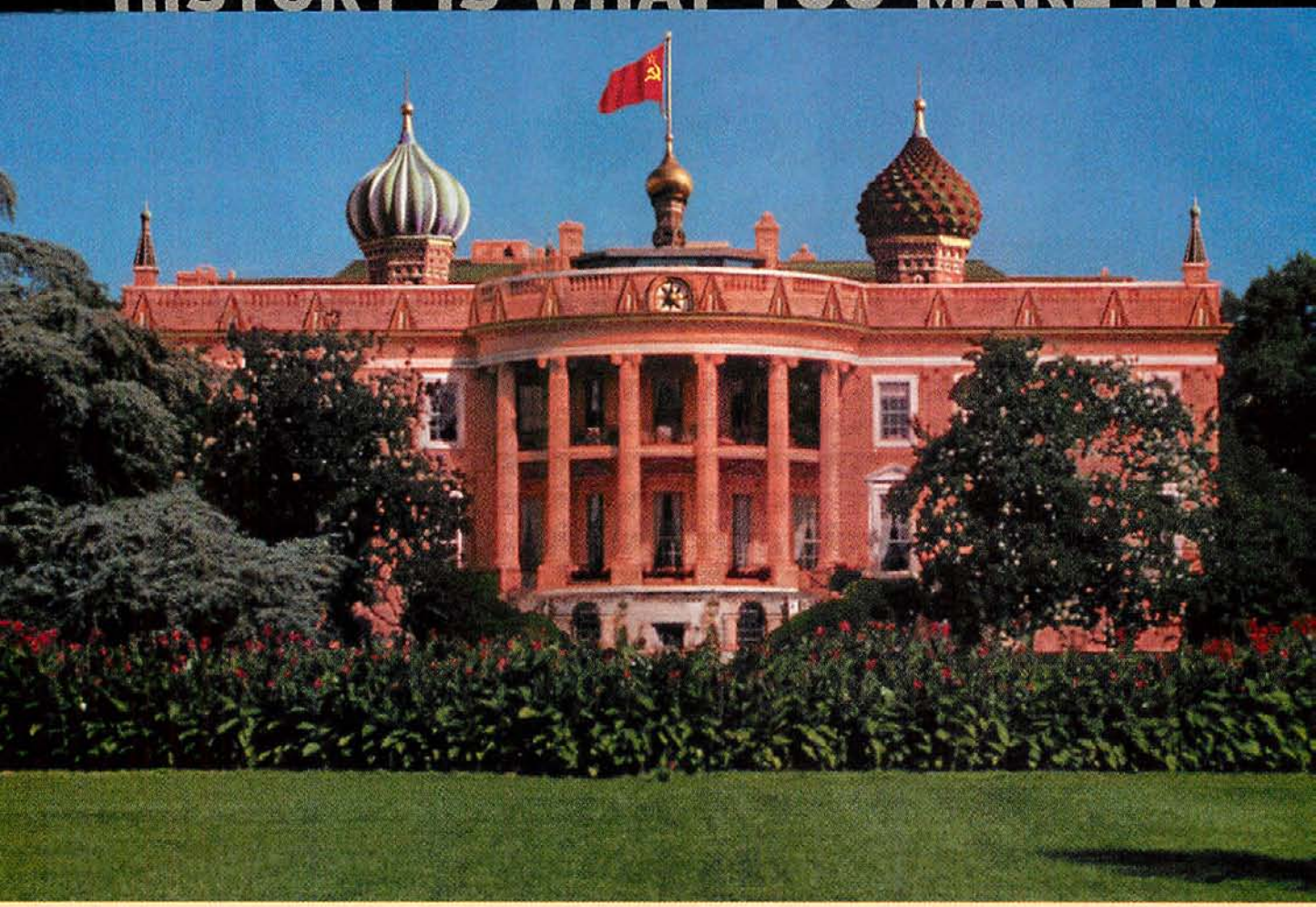
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Aztella™

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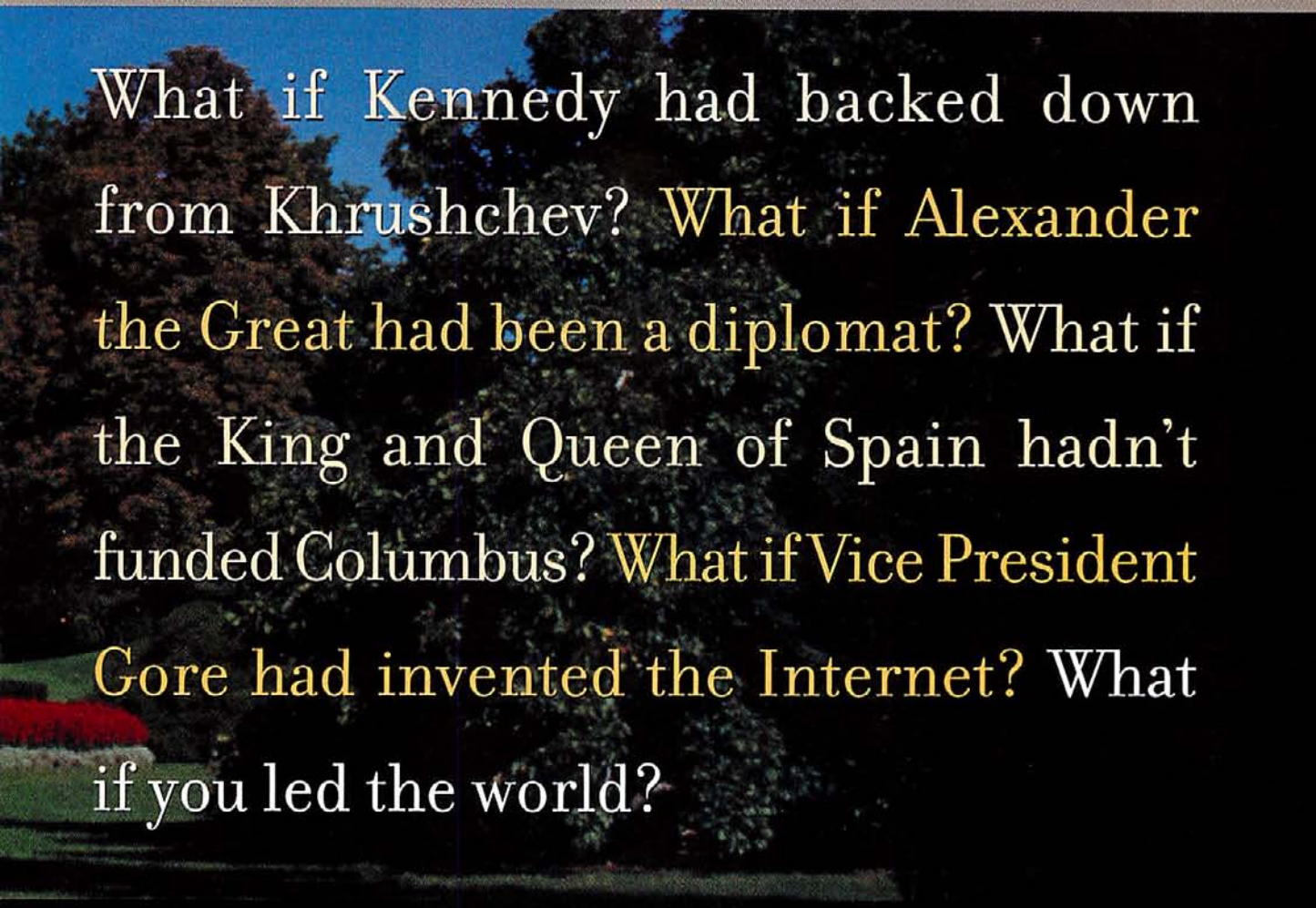






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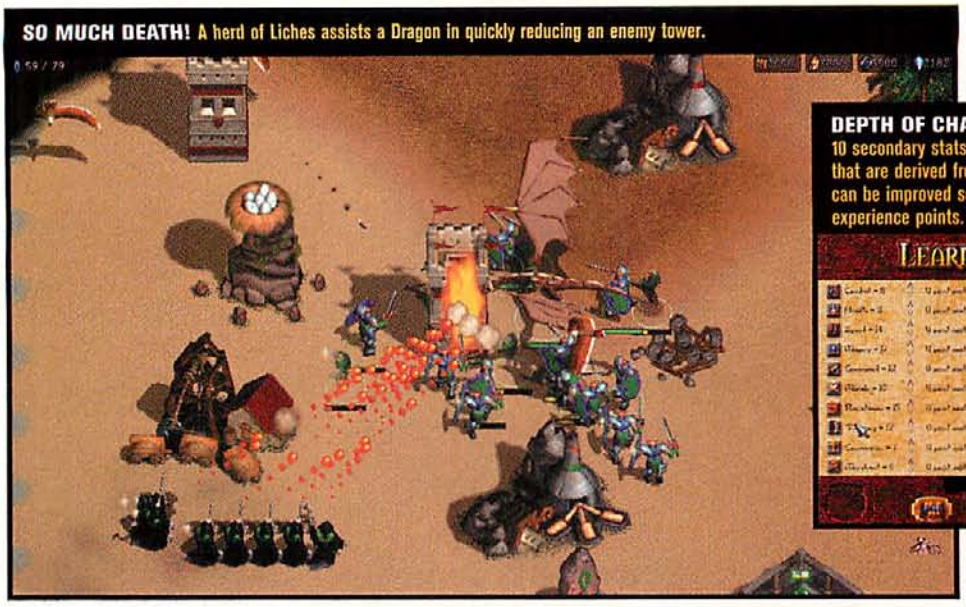
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RATING PENDING RP

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SO MUCH DEATH! A herd of Liches assists a Dragon in quickly reducing an enemy tower.

DEPTH OF CHARACTER Each character has 10 secondary stats, like Command and Morale, that are derived from the primary stats but which can be improved separately – if you have the experience points.



Without its WARLORDS-style heroes, this damsel would be in serious distress

Heroes to the Rescue

WARLORDS BATTLECRY

reviewed by Jason Kapalka

Could WARLORDS BATTLECRY be the least-anticipated game of the year? Fans of SSG's long-running turn-based WARLORDS games were skeptical, to say the least, of their beloved franchise's abrupt leap onto the real-time bandwagon; die-hard RTS fanatics merely sneered (if they noticed at all) at what seemed to be an outdated 2D rip-off of WARCRAFT II, limping onto the scene at a time when titles like GROUND CONTROL and SHOGUN are making 3D the standard.

But what adventurous gamers will discover is an intriguing, if not wholly successful, blend of role-playing and traditional real-time strategy. If it's not likely to make the WARCRAFT III team at Blizzard quake in their boots, BATTLECRY does succeed where the ballyhooed TOTAL ANNIHILATION: KINGDOMS fell flat on its 3D polygonal face; it's the best real-time fantasy/strategy game since, well, WARCRAFT II.

Not Even Skindeep

Sadly, your first impression of BATTLECRY is unlikely to be good. Despite supporting resolutions of up to 1024x800, the graphics are, frankly, a bit lame. Forsaking the more realistic isometric view favored by recent games like AGE OF KINGS for the slightly warped top-down perspective of older titles doesn't help, nor does the fact that the buildings, terrain, and units are uniformly clunky and lackluster. Worst of all, units and buildings are often very hard to distinguish from one another: A gold mine looks much like a rock quarry which looks alarmingly similar to an iron mine, while your crucial hero unit is distinguished from run-of-the-mill grunts primarily by the tiny, easy-to-miss flag he carries around. Eeerk.

While the interface does offer all the gimmicks and conveniences we've come to expect from a modern RTS title (stackable waypoints, production queues, rally points, formations, defensive or aggressive stances), it's not exactly a miracle of ergonomics. It's all too possible, for instance, to click on a rapidly-perishing hero's portrait in an effort to get him clear of danger, only to find you've accidentally brought up

CGW RATED

PROS

Nine interestingly varied races and a massively deep character-development system make for nearly endless replayability.

CONS

Lackluster graphics and clumsy interface elements make it hard to see past the surface.

THE QUICK AND THE DEAD Heroes come in all shapes and (unhealthy) colors, with 9 races and 16 classes to choose from. Heroes gain experience and levels not just in campaign play, but in multiplayer and in skirmishes against the AI.



Requirements: Pentium 233MHz, 64MB RAM, 130 MB hard drive space. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium 300MHz. **3D Support:** None
Multiplayer Support: Modem (2 players), LAN, Mplayer, or TCP/IP (2-6 players); one CD per player.

Publisher: SSI/Mattel Interactive • **Developer:** SSG • **$40** • **www.warlordsbattlecry.com** • **ESRB Rating:** Teen; animated violence.



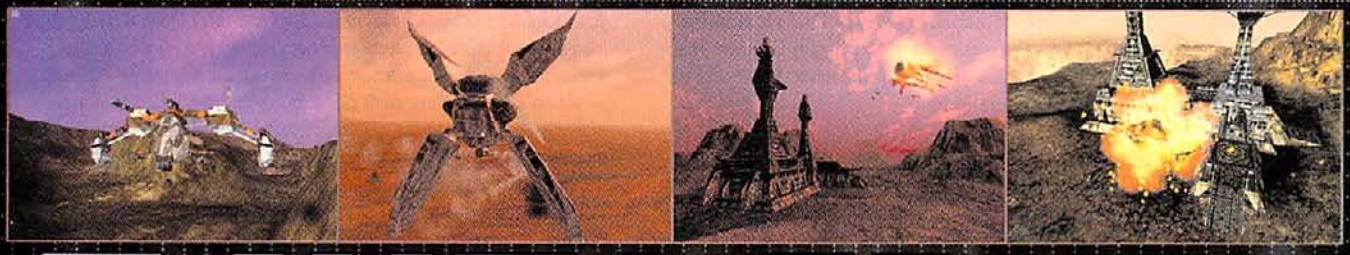
THE EVOLUTION OF FLIGHT COMBAT

Echelon puts the player in white-knuckle air combat over lush alien landscapes and towering cities in a futuristic war. While exploring several branching campaigns and a gripping storyline, the player-pilot advances in rank and assumes greater control over wingmen during combat. As a hot-shot pilot you'll fly a variety of craft types with different flight models that provide changing and challenging tactical combat in both single-player and multi-player games. Shoot and maneuver, pursue and evade a cunning and ruthless enemy over eye-popping, breath-taking terrains.

Echelon features:

- Spectacular 3D graphics presenting highly realistic environments + effects
- Fourteen selectable player craft with over 20 different weapons
- Customizable controls + autopilot functions offer you perfect combination of action + sim
- Two branching campaigns promise a different experience each time you play
- Multiplayer support for up to 16 players over the Internet, including co-op + deathmatch

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ECHELON

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the spellbook that covers half the screen. Double eeerk.

And the aggravations continue. It's quite easy to build structures in a position where exiting units will be trapped, permanently, between the building and adjacent obstacles. If the pathfinding is generally good, the AI is sometimes suspect, with dimwitted troops standing stoically as they are bombarded from afar. The campaign scenarios are an exercise in frustration, from voice actors who seem to have been instructed to sound as condescendingly snotty as possible, to the incredible (but familiar) irritation of having to keep three or more unique allied characters alive to win, most of which are all too easy to mistake for normal units, and all of which have a tendency to charge suicidally into battle against overwhelming odds.

CIRCLE OF POWER Your heroes have a command radius, within which troops become more powerful and aggressive.



CHILDREN OF THE NIGHT Thanks to powerful magic, these Undead troops grow stronger as they attack under the cover of artificial nightfall.



Pretty on the Inside

In fact, it's not until you take a break from the campaign for some skirmish games vs. the computer that you're likely to start enjoying WARLORDS BATTLECRY, and it's not until you've played a half-dozen games and leveled-up your hero that you'll start to appreciate the game's depth.

Heroes are your key units in the game: They can build structures, rally troops, cast spells, and most importantly, convert resources. Rather than building refineries or peons, in BATTLECRY you simply take over existing mines via the Conversion command – your hero waves his crudely-animated arms around for a minute or two – and *poof!* All the mines within his radius begin producing resources for you (your standard gold, ore, stone, and crystal).

Apart from this quirk, BATTLECRY's basic gameplay is very familiar: Build structures, produce troops, upgrade your tech, build more and better troops or defenses, crush the foe, etc. Where the game distinguishes itself is in the variety of the available races, and in the awesome complexity of the hero and race system.

BORED STIFFS A troop of skeletons amuse themselves by juggling their swords. These idle animations help a little bit in livening up the otherwise drab visuals of the game.



There are nine races, ranging from doughty dwarfs to beefy minotaurs; and if they're all standard fantasy archetypes, their play mechanics are refreshingly varied. The minotaurs, for instance, have exactly one basic unit. It's called a Minotaur. However, they can build a variety of upgrades for that unit, giving it the ability to attack flying units, stronger armor, and so on. While the Humans play in standard WARCRAFT fashion, the Undead produce most of their elite units by "morphing" skeletons into Wights, Wights into Liches, and so forth, in a manner similar to STARCRAFT's Zerg.

Some races require huge amounts of gold, others crystal, and so on. Some, like the Humans, can convert one resource to another using marketplaces; others, like the Dark Elves, lack this convenience but instead have the ability to summon hordes of Thralls to work their mines, or perish in sacrificial rites to summon a mighty Daemon. The differences between races, and the strategies involved to win with each, are quite dramatic.

From Zero to Hero

But the real meat of the game is the hero system. While heroes are always crucial for building initial structures and capturing resources, as they increase in level they gain even more impressive abilities. With a monstrously complicated stats system (9 races, 16 classes, 10 schools of magic, 2 dozen skills, 60 different abilities, 80+ spells), you're free to construct any number of different hero types as you gain experience points, from a summoner who can raise packs of supernatural beasts, to stealthy assassins, to more traditional sword-wielding warriors and fireball-hurling wizards. As in the turn-based WARLORDS games, mini-quests available at shrines frequently offer the reward of a hero-enhancing magic item, if you complete their objective (slay X enemies, answer a riddle) in a limited time.

Adding to the sense of continuity the hero offers is the Retinue, a pool of powerful units you can bring along with you. Tough generals or experienced troops can be stored in the Retinue and then carried over to another game or scenario, depending on the handicap setting (weaker sides will get more points to bring in more of their Retinue or extra basic units).

While a few earlier games – notably RAGE OF MAGES and its sequel NECROMANCER – tried to incorporate the persistent characters of the role-playing genre into real-time strategy, BATTLECRY is the first game to make it work. You really do develop an attachment to your hero, and agonize over where to spend your hard-earned ability points. Should you buy a new skill? Enhance an attribute? Increase your command radius? Save up for Spell Mastery? Do you choose to lead a race that complements your hero's strengths, or pick a side with weaknesses you can shore up? Without the heroes, BATTLECRY would be merely a competent clone, but with them, it becomes a surprisingly addictive, almost infinitely replayable experience. The robust multiplayer suite increases longevity further, allowing you to set up any number of different scenarios, including randomly-generated maps and team games with or without AI players.

Once you get over the dull graphics and interface glitches, BATTLECRY manages to retain a surprising amount of the old WARLORDS charm, while offering new-school RTS gamers a novel challenge. It's the first RTS game to successfully incorporate that "just one more level" hook that makes titles like DIABLO or MIGHT & MAGIC so addictive. Now, if you'll pardon me, I have to level-up my Undead Necromancer so I can buy that third-level spell I've had my eye on... CGW

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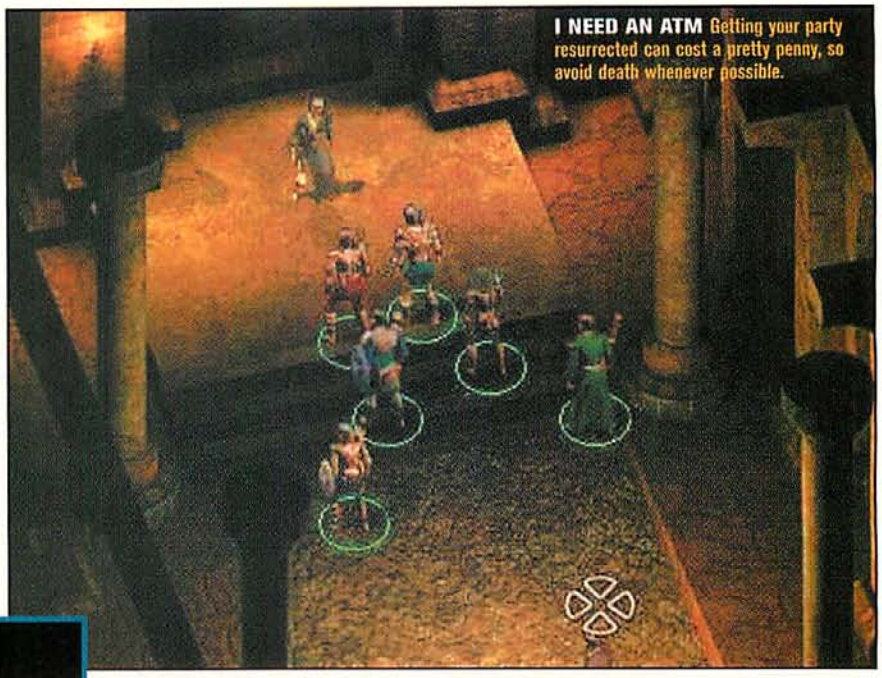
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ICEWIND DALE is a first-rate D&D dungeon romp

Ice Ice Baby!

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD EDITORS' CHOICE



I NEED AN ATM Getting your party resurrected can cost a pretty penny, so avoid death whenever possible.

The RPG genre has been suffering for the last few years from a lack of games that truly capture the spirit of role-playing. Although there's been a plethora of wannabes, few games claiming to be of the RPG variety have lived up to the claim – they're usually action and/or adventure games in disguise. Black Isle's ICEWIND DALE is the developer's third foray into the *AD&D* world of the Forgotten Realms, and is a cup of refreshingly cold ice water in the vast desert of the RPG genre. Its been a long time since I've found a game that has held my interest for more than a couple of days at most. I've been playing ICEWIND DALE for several weeks now.

ICEWIND DALE

reviewed by by Tina "Cassandra" Haumersen

Anyone who has read *The Crystal Shard*, the first book of the Icewind Dale Trilogy by R.A. Salvatore, will find much of the unfolding story in ICEWIND DALE familiar. But because the game doesn't tell the same story as the book, those who haven't read the book aren't at a disadvantage. The biggest advantage readers will have is in being familiar with the region. You start off in Easthaven, one of the infamous Ten Towns in the Icewind Dale region of the Forgotten Realms, north of the Spine Of The World. However, you don't play Drizzt, Wulfgar, Bruenor, or anyone else from the story. In fact, the game is set over a decade before Drizzt – one of *D&D*'s most popular characters – makes his first literary appearance.

ICEWIND DALE uses Bioware's Infinity engine, the same used in BALDUR'S GATE. It's set in the same world, but its relationship to BALDUR'S GATE ends there. It's set in a different area of the world and the story doesn't relate in any way. While the interface and game may feel familiar to those who have played the earlier games, if you're looking for a BALDUR'S GATE sequel, you need to wait for BALDUR'S GATE 2.



Stone Cold

The game begins with the moderator (voiced by the talented David Ogden Stiers) telling of an invasion from the creatures of the lower planes, a desperate battle, and the emergence of a hero who saves the world but gets turned into a large stone, not unlike Han Solo in *The Empire Strikes Back*. Rather than the now-standard 3D-rendered intro movie, ICEWIND DALE's intro unfolds as a series of hand-drawn sketches, which gives a richer flavor to the narrative.

Character creation is a long and involved process – at least, if you want to get it right – and a dream come true for hardcore role-players. There are no pre-rolled characters to use; you must create your entire party from scratch, which usually means you form a greater attachment to your party than when you are issued stock characters.

Using the basic *AD&D* rules, you can choose from a variety of races and classes, everything from humans to gnomes and paladins to druids. Each character type has its advantages and disadvantages, as do the classes and alignments. Many NPCs react

CGW RATED



PROS

Highly customizable characters gives you a greater attachment to them.

CONS

A bit of a steep learning curve for combat.

Requirements: Pentium 233MHz MMX or faster, 32 MB RAM, 400 MB hard drive space. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-II 266MHz or faster, 64 MB RAM, 600 MB hard drive space, 8X CD-ROM, 4 MB SVGA video card **Multiplayer Support:** LAN, TCP/IP, modem, serial (null modem).

Publisher: Interplay • **Developer:** Black Isle • $44 • www.interplay.com/icewind • **ESRB Rating:** Teen; animated violence.

What do you stand for?



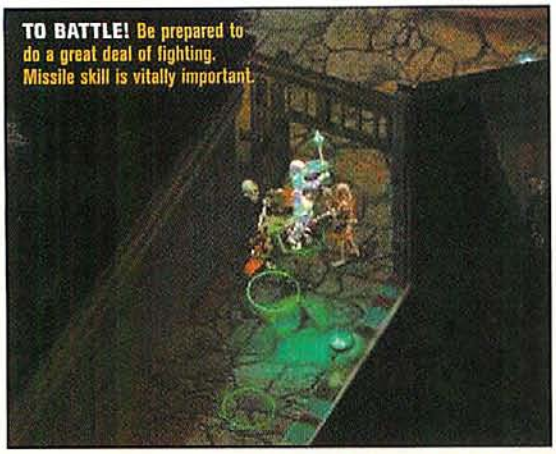
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TO BATTLE! Be prepared to do a great deal of fighting. Missile skill is vitally important.

differently to different types of characters, so you'll want a good variety. (Hint: Make sure the majority of your party have some sort of missile-weapon skill.) You can import your own character portraits and voice files for your characters, and Interplay has released some new portraits by one of their artists on their Web site (**www.interplay.com/icewind/**), as well as several PLANESCAPE: TORMENT portraits that were altered to fit ICEWIND DALE.



CUSTOMIZING IS GOOD Write a customized script to control your party's behavior during battles, and write your own background for each character.

Die, Monster, Die!

Combat in ICEWIND DALE is intense and plentiful. Rather than immerse you in FedEx quests, most of the game involves combat in a large variety of dungeons. Yes, ICEWIND DALE is ultimately a dungeon crawl, but it's a good crawl. As in BALDUR'S GATE, combat can be real-time, turn-based, or a mix of the two. Being able to pause the action while directing your druid to heal your party is vitally important, or you'll quickly find yourself with a large party of corpses – and it can get rather expensive to have them constantly resurrected.

The ICEWIND DALE combat system rewards clever strategy over a fast mouse-hand. You can't run into an area, click on everything with an axe and expect your party to survive, especially in some of the more dangerous and difficult areas. You'll want to walk slowly into an area and lure some of the creatures into range, and then hit them with as many missile weapons as you can before they get close enough to do any damage.

One of the game's best features is the ability to use scripts to control your party during combat, either using the pre-written scripts that come with the game, or by writing your own. You can set your fighters to go berserk as soon as a battle starts, or have your mages cast offensive or defensive spells and then run to safety if anyone comes close enough to attack. After your first few forays into combat situations, you'll learn what works best with your style of play and may find yourself rolling some new characters. Characters can be exported from the single-player game and then imported into multiplayer games or for use in other saved games.

The multiplayer game is the same as the single-player game, except that instead of creating your party and controlling them, your party consists of other players using their own characters. The host starting the game is the leader and is in control of things such as saving the game and deciding who can join and what types of characters to allow. You can either import one of your previously-created characters, or use a button to pre-generate a generic character. The leader can set up various permissions as well, deciding whether people can spend party gold, pause the game, or initiate dialogue, among other things.

Bring It On

After such a long dry spell, there seems to be a large number of RPGs hitting the shelves these days. Everyone's trying to cash in on the action and there's a lot of hype surrounding some of the biggest names. For serious role-players, I'd recommend ICEWIND DALE before DIABLO 2. While DIABLO 2's pure hack-and-slash approach can get tiring after awhile, ICEWIND DALE manages to combine a lot of slashing with a great story and more strategic gameplay. Once again, Black Isle has succeeded admirably in creating a game that both the casual gamer and hardcore roleplayer can enjoy. CGW



It's My Party, I'll Die When I Want To

Little piddly goblin marshals taking you down? Here are some tips for optimizing your party makeup.

- **No matter what, every character should put at least one star in a ranged weapon of some sort, whether it be bows or missile weapons. Ranged weaponry is extremely powerful, and having at least one star in a ranged weapon means you don't suffer any penalties when using one. Give fighters and thieves bows, and the rest of the party slings.**

- **Put two fighter-types up front. Have at least one pure fighter, and either create another pure fighter, or something "fighter-ish" (Ranger, Paladin, or one of the multi-class Fighter combinations). With the best weapons and armor, they will soak up and deal the most damage.**

- **Back up the fighters with two priests; at least one pure cleric, and either another cleric, or a druid, or a multiclass involving one of the two. Have one memorize nothing but healing spells, and the other a few healing spells and some general spells. There will be a lot of undead, so the pure cleric is needed for Turn Undead. Having two healers ensures survival in large dungeons away from town.**

- **Have at least one mage, preferably two. The mage is artillery; physically weak, needs protection, but possesses vital firepower. To ensure your mage stays out of combat, he or she should never have a melee weapon (unless that weapon enhances spell-casting skills). Stick to slings.**

- **You need at least one thief for both trap spotting/disarming, and to serve as "bait." We prefer the multiclass Mage/Thief, as he provides thieving abilities and extra spell support. Take the armor off, cast spells, then re-arm and backstab everyone else.**

—Thierry Nguyen


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HELL ON WHEELS
The Unipsycho is a one-wheeled, fire-lobbing circus freak and is one of the game's several well-designed enemies.

It's Not Part of My Rock 'n' Roll Fantasy

It's a KISS game and there's not a guitar-gun or groupie in sight

Any discussion about freakishly hairy, blood-spewing men in towering platform demon boots and nightmarish Kabuki makeup is going to struggle a little in maintaining anything approximating an earthbound sense of proportion. Thankfully, KISS PSYCHO CIRCUS: THE NIGHTMARE CHILD abandons any such namby-pamby notions of scale and revels in the excess that defines its source material, Todd McFarlane's excellent *KISS Psycho Circus* comic book – itself loosely based on the Grand Guignol heavy-metal theatrics of the band, KISS. The game does justice to KISS licensing, but there're a few things that prevent it from being a game worth recommending – regardless of whether you're a KISS fan or not.

KISS PSYCHO CIRCUS: THE NIGHTMARE CHILD

reviewed by Jason Babler

Play it Loud

The game never lets you forget it's all about KISS. From posters, song-blaring radios, and hidden references, the game is one long knowing-wink to members of the KISS army. Just don't expect any voice-overs from any members of the band. You'll want to crank the volume nice and loud – the better to enjoy the monsters' and bosses' grunts, growls, or insane laughter, and the jukeboxes blasting KISS songs (plus, you'll get a nice reward if you wait out the entire song). Unfortunately, you'll want to shove wax into your ears and strap yourself to a pole during the annoying tutorial and the ear-chafing speech of your gypsy guide, Madame Raven.

The game's premise is straight out of the comic: The usual four avatars that harbor the KISS Elders were members of a circus. They're all evil now, and it's up to you and your band to save the world and battle them as end bosses before fighting the main *enfant terrible*, the Nightmare Child. You can choose to play as any of the characters at any time, but the game suggests a certain order for storyline continuity and difficulty ramping. You start out playing as the Starbearer, collecting armor pieces to become the Elder and fight the level boss.

Each level is based around the Elder's elemental realm: Earth, Air, Water, and Fire. For instance, Earth is home to the the Beast King, so you wreak your mayhem across green caverns, hills, and tunnels. The Demon's Fire realm features magma, blood, and raging furnaces.



FASHION DO'S AND DON'TS ***Do*** float in the air when donning new armor pieces. ***Don't*** feel compelled to vomit blood, just because you turn into a demon.



CGW RATED

PROS
Great-looking game, great-looking enemies, and hey, you play as Gene Simmons.

CONS
Bugs, dumb AI, and a lack of weapon variety.

Requirements: Pentium 233, 500MB hard drive space, 64MB RAM. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-II 400, 96MB RAM, 16MB 3D accelerator.
3D Support: Direct 3D **Multiplayer Support:** LAN, Internet (2-16 players); one CD per player.

Publisher: Gathering of Developers • Developer: Third Law Interactive • $40 • www.kisspsychocircus.com
ESRB Rating: Mature; animated blood, gore, and violence.



BAD CASE OF CRABS The Headless make up for their lack of AI smarts by attacking in incredible numbers.



EXPRESS TRAIN TO HELL The haunted Nether Station levels may sound silly, but they're among the coolest in the game.



PUFF'S A WIMPY DRAGON If only more of the weaponry were styled along the lines of the Demon's ultimate weapon, a flame-spewing, shoulder-perching Lil' Dragon.



DEWEY DECIBEL SYSTEM Clues to secrets practically scream "Use Me!"

Circus, Schmirkus

The Lithtech-powered gameworlds are vivid and richly-colored; that said, level design could use some help. Despite the unique level themes, you'll still see a lot of the usual FPS suspects: cliffs, city buildings, old mansions, and even a nuclear plant. The most disappointing levels are the circus levels: Just how "psycho" is a circus where the creepiness doesn't extend beyond clown images with fangs? There are some highlights, such as working your way up a monstrous cathedral to a bell tower; or the occasional little surprises, like walking into a room of monsters line-dancing to a KISS song.

Galloping through levels is pretty easy, since they're designed as straightforward key-finding, button-pushing journeys that don't tax your foraging skills. What is taxing is how the special power-ups and armor are explained only through "pamphlets" you pick up in the game and nowhere else. I didn't know what the "chaos heart" did specifically until the last half of the game, because I didn't find the right pamphlet.

God of Thunder, and Not Much Else

The highlight of the game, the point at which everything comes together, is when you play as the Demon. Too bad it's only the last quarter of the game. The best level design is here, populated by the most challenging amount of baddies, and did I mention, *playing as Gene Simmons ROCKS*! For this one portion of the game, you really feel like you were raised by demons and are lord of the wastelands. In comparison, the other Elders feel like just so much assorted armor.

This isn't a bad game, but gameplay is mind-numbing in parts, and some of that blame falls on the weapons. Why do all the Elders use the same four weapons, with only the melee and ultimate weapons unique to each? Why must four totally different avatars share the same chaingun, shotgun, whip, and grenade launcher? Shouldn't the Demon have an arsenal of hellfire-based weaponry? At the very least, secondary-fire options would have broken up the monotony.

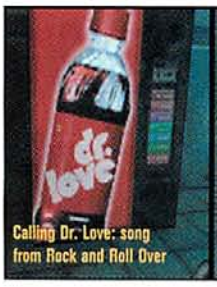
Sinister Sideshow

The main challenge in the game comes from the amount of enemies. This is a game designed around the "more is more" philosophy, with hordes of bad guys spilling over walls, through doors, and down stairs. These are not brainiac, HALF-LIFE-caliber bad guys – these nasties aren't smart enough to move over a foot when you're blasting their arm off. But there are so many of them – so many DOOM-style swarming hordes of monsters – that you'll be frantically fighting for your life almost constantly. By the end of the game I so hated the Stumps, with their little canine barks and fire-belching bite, I had to ask editor Robert Coffey for new sailor talk.

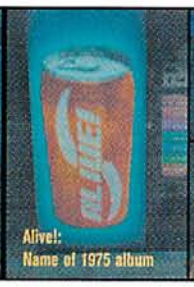
The chaos the hordes create is giddily, dizzyingly bloody. Imagine hacking through a sea of headless monstrosities with your melee weapon because you're low on ammo and that Spawner behind the horde keeps spitting more out. The ground awash in blood, you inch your way through the crowd, ignoring the flying Gasbags belching poisonous green clouds, the Fatlady on the ledge lobbing exploding lengths of her intestines at you, and the bloated Ballbuster firing cannon balls from atop a nearby building. Run away? Don't even think about it – narrow passageways and the "there's-only-more-ahead" design puts you under the love gun constantly. These are truly inspired atrocities – too bad the weak boss AI lets you simply hide behind something and whip them to death.

A few other problems get in the way at times. Some clipping problems trapped my character in spots, forcing me to reload my last quicksave; I had to constantly remap my forward- and back-keys; one of my quicksaves crashed and forced me to restart a whole level; and a few times the game just crashed. Frustrating? Oh yeah.

There's a dearth of good shooters right now, and KISS PSYCHO CIRCUS: THE NIGHTMARE CHILD is a wild ride for shooter fans willing to forgive (and shoot) a lot. In the end, this game is a great time for KISS fans and a so-so time for gamers. CGW



Calling Dr. Love: song from Rock and Roll Over



Alive!: Name of 1975 album

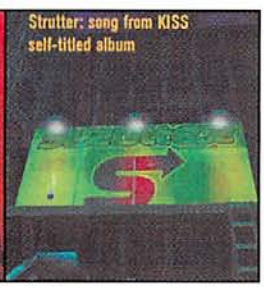


Cold Gin: song from KISS self-titled album

The Coventry: Site of the first KISS concert



Clown art from Psycho Circus album



Strutter: song from KISS self-titled album

Welcome to cookie cutter Formula One racing

When Mediocrity Is (Yawn) Good

Mediocrity isn't necessarily a bad thing. Sure, it's easy to condemn any game that doesn't advance its genre, but this is a shortsighted view which fails to recognize the fun that can be had with recent titles like NOX, SOLDIER OF FORTUNE, and even DIABLO II – games that provide hours of entertainment without even the pretense of breaking new ground.

F1 WORLD GRAND PRIX boldly joins the ranks of the fun-but-unambitious. The Lankhor-designed racing sim would best be summed up as stunningly average. Its visual and sound stylings are more workmanlike than inspired, and its physics engine has been cobbled together with parts from every Formula One racer released since 1997. Yet, as bland as this looks on paper, it's hard to really criticize the game. While I'll forget all about it no more than 15 minutes after completing this review, I can't say that I didn't enjoy the ride.

F1 WORLD GRAND PRIX

reviewed by Brett Todd

A Face in the Crowd

Unsurprisingly enough, virtually nothing about F1WGP stands out. The game is an acceptable recreation of the 1999 Formula One season, complete with all 11 teams, 22 drivers, and 16 tracks. It comes complete with configurable practice, single race, and championship season modes, along with a thorough garage feature that lets you adjust your vehicle in almost every way imaginable.

Game physics vary, depending on your choice of arcade or simulation difficulty. The former makes everything more forgiving, allowing you to slam on the brakes at the last possible second without locking up your wheels, punch it off the blocks without spinning out too much, and so on. This setting seems perfectly suited to the game – cars and track conditions are only vaguely reminiscent of reality, yet still authentic enough to be both captivating and challenging. The simulation mode is plagued with problems. While opposing drivers are a lot more cutthroat, everything else is erratic. Tires lock up in turns, no matter how you approach them. Even the lightest touch on the brakes regularly brings on an uncontrollable powerslide that leads directly to the grass or dirt.

FOOL IN THE RAIN? An incredible variety of cameras allow you to scope out the action from almost any trackside angle. Here's a close-up of my car as a race gets underway in rainy Montreal.



Arcade physics are also supposed to lessen damage taken in collisions, although I found the damage model to be all over the place, in both settings. You can usually drive out of crack-ups that would leave real-world drivers maimed, but then minor bumps often result in serious damage. Just touching the car in front of me while negotiating a turn often left my vehicle with a flailing front wing or a blown tire. Fortunately, even something this serious never prevented me from quickly reaching the pits for a speedy repair.

Some Tea, Mr. Schumacher?

Presentation values are high, but in a low-key way that doesn't draw attention to special effects. The Direct3D-accelerated visuals do a good job of depicting just what you need to see, although there's a slightly grainy appearance to everything. Cars, tracks, grandstands, and other scenery look exactly as they're supposed to. Audio is very similar. Unlike other racing titles, where engine and pit-crew whining assault you with obnoxious volume, sound effects here are as well-mannered as a tea party two doors down. While some will be disappointed, I found this a nice change of pace.

Bottom line: Stick with the arcade mode in F1WGP, turn damage off, and confine yourself to solo races and the smooth online multiplayer option. While this means forgoing a full championship season (only available with the simulation setting turned on), the effects in sim mode are just too irregular and frustrating to bother with. No matter how you cut it, this isn't a racing sim in the tradition of MicroProse's GRAND PRIX series or anything by the oil-soaked gurus at Papyrus. But if you're just out for a few days of fun at the racetrack, you could do worse than this one. CGW

FIFTH WHEEL? MAN, I JUST WANT TO KEEP FOUR! Minor fender-benders typically result in massive damage to your front wing, or wheel. Expect to lose a lot of tire assemblies when making turns, if you're not extra cautious about bumping cars.



CGW RATED

PROS

Probably the most accessible F1 title currently available for the PC.

CONS

Spotty physics and a constant sense of having been there, done that.

Requirements: Pentium 166MHz MMX, 32MB RAM, 250MB hard drive space, 4X CD-ROM drive, Direct3D card with 4MB memory, DirectX 7.0-compatible sound and video cards. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-II 266MHz, 64MB RAM, 250MB hard drive space, 8X CD-ROM drive, Direct3D card with 8MB memory. **3D Support:** Direct3D **Multiplayer Support:** Up to 12 players via LAN or TCP/IP (Internet); up to four on a single computer (split-screen).

Publisher: Eidos • Developer: Lankhor • $28 • www.eidos.com • ESRB Rating: Everyone



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AIRBORNE Keeping track of your units can be hard, but that's a problem in real life as well.

TOY SOLDIERS For the hexagonally-challenged, there's a 3D view.

Saving Private Ryan, one turn at a time

Hedgerow Hell

PANZER CAMPAIGNS: NORMANDY '44

reviewed by Bruce Geryk

When you've got a perfectly good wargame system that's served well for several years, why change? That must be John Tiller's philosophy, and it hasn't steered him wrong yet. The designer of TalonSoft's popular BATTLEGROUND series of 19th-Century tactical-warfare games, Tiller took his brainchild to Scott Hamilton's HPS Simulations last year and released his first game, PANZER CAMPAIGNS: SMOLENSK '41. This was the first in a projected series of Panzer Campaigns games that will cover famous actions during World War II, both on the eastern and western fronts. While the system has evolved, the graphics and gameplay still bear the unmistakable marks of the line of games we grew to love on the fields of TILLER'S WATERLOO and GETTYSBURG. Long-time fans will find plenty to like here.

All Ashore That's Going Ashore

NORMANDY '44 covers the Allied D-Day landing on June 6, 1944, at the company level, using the familiar hex-based grid inherited from board games. Hexes represent 1 km across; each turn is two hours of historical time; and scenarios range from the first few hours at Omaha Beach, to the entire Normandy campaign, from the landing to the August breakout. Longevity is one of the game's strong points.

The game system used in NORMANDY '44 is turn-based, but comes in two flavors. The first is a combined movement/combat system where all actions – whether moving, firing, or entering into close assault combat – take place during one phase. Defensive fire is automatically handled by the computer (even if you're playing against a live opponent) and the result is very wide-open, which sometimes seems at odds with the ferocious, inch-by-inch combat the game is trying to recreate. Gamers can opt for a more traditional system in which movement, defensive fire, and combat all take place in defined phases. This will appeal to those players who need to retain control at all times, but it will also radically change the flow of the game. The latter system significantly tips the balance in favor of the Germans in some scenarios.

Home Before Christmas?

When wargames came in cardboard boxes with lots of little counters to manage, there was a physical limit to the size a game could assume in order to remain playable. Computer wargames greatly extended that limit, with mixed results. While the ability to re-fight all of Waterloo on a very small scale or to re-create giant Russian front encirclements without having to clean out the basement is a good thing, it imposes a certain discipline on the designer to keep things manageable. In NORMANDY '44, however, Tiller seems to have gotten a bit carried away with his infinite virtual canvas, and as a result, some of the large scenarios can be a bit of a chore. There is a good selection of small scenarios, and some players will revel in the ability to simulate the entire invasion from June to August; but a slightly more focused design would have yielded a better game. In the campaign, sitting through an AI move can be tedious.

NORMANDY '44 is only available direct from HPS Simulations, and it lacks a printed manual, but the documentation on the CD is extensive and printer-friendly. This is a solid, fun, polished game from a talented game designer. Any wargame fan will want to own it. CGW

CGW RATED



PROS

Simple game system with emphasis on strategy; many scenarios.

CONS

Game balance upset by system changes; large scenarios are very unwieldy.

Requirements: Pentium 133MHZ, 32MB RAM, 200MB hard drive space. **Multiplayer Support:** Email/hotseat (2 players); TCP/IP (8 players).

Publisher: HPS Simulations • **Developer:** John Tiller • $40, plus shipping • www.hpssims.com • **ESRB Rating:** Not rated.

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STAR TREK CONQUEST ONLINE



STAR TREK CONQUEST ONLINE makes us remember why *Magic* was the only real winner in the trading-card game wars: The others were deeply flawed and full of bad design choices.

Star Trek's biggest gaffe was a slew of cards whose sole purpose was to negate rare cards. Genetic Anomalies has done humankind the favor of recreating this real-world disappointment in a virtual setting.

At least a virtual card game lets you save tons of deck combinations and trade with anyone in the world. You're still stuck with the horrible auction phase of the game, where instead of drawing your own cards, a random piece is pulled and players bid to get good cards, or to pass on the bad ones.

You can buy booster packs of 15 pieces online for $3, or a starter pack for $10. Why, in an online game, are the pieces distributed in the same numbers and prices as real-world cards? Why the hell am I bothering to play online? At least in reality, I can put my hands on the darn things. As aggravating as this is, it also leads to a real gameplay problem: If your opponent is willing to shell out the money, he's virtually guaranteed to win.

★½☆☆☆

I suppose this could have worked if Genetic Anomalies hadn't straightjacketed itself into remaking an already miserable card game. It also might have worked if they'd reworked the game mechanics so that so many pieces didn't exist solely to remove Captain Picard, or Worf, or Troi, or whomever else, from play. As it stands now, STAR TREK CONQUEST ONLINE definitely does justice to a half-assed trading-card game that never had anything going for it, outside of an $80 Captain Picard. *–Alex Handy*

Genre: Strategy • **Publisher:** Activision • **Developer:** Genetic Anomolies
$30 • www.activision.com • **ESRB Rating:** Everyone

BEACHHEAD 2000

Genre: Action • **Publisher:** WizardWorlds • **Developer:** Digital Fusion • $20 • wizard-works.com • **ESRB Rating:** Teen



Here's some chicken-fried steak for the gaming soul. It's of modest quality, and you know it's terrible for you, but something about it makes you shovel it down your gullet.

BEACHHEAD 2000 is a 3D remake of an 80s-era 2D arcade game, its rebirth no doubt inspired by the opening scene of *Saving Private Ryan*. You play that German machine-gunner who mows down rows of G.I. Joes before they even set foot off their landing craft and onto French soil. In the arcade universe, your machine-gun is augmented with air-to-air missiles and artillery shells with which to pound back grunts, tanks, armored cars, jets, helicopters, and strategic bombers. They just keep coming at you, and you just keep shooting, wave after wave after wave.

★★★½☆

It's stupid-simple, it's repetitive, and I played it a lot longer than I care to admit. *–Chris Lombardi*

START-UP 2000

Genre: Business Simulation • **Publisher:** Interplay • **Developer:** Monte Cristo
$30 • www.montecristo-multi.com • **ESRB Rating:** Everyone



If you've dreamed of starting a high-tech company, making a few billion on the IPO, then retiring with a martini in one hand and a babe on one arm, START-UP 2000 might be for you. START-UP 2000 puts you in the seat of an entrepreneur, flush with fresh venture-capital cash, eager to dominate the globe in one of three markets: video phones, game consoles, or "cyber-televisions." You are responsible for everything from deciding which features to include in your product; hiring staff for functions such as R&D, finance, production, and tech support; budgets for advertising and PR; setting selling price; and negotiating with retailers.

★★★½☆

The features that make START-UP 2000 an enjoyable simulation – i.e., the myriad of variables that you control – can also make it somewhat frustrating for someone who just wants a game they can jump right into. The tutorial is fairly non-instructive and the requirements for success are not necessarily intuitive. However, an excellent manual/strategy guide does much to get you started in the right direction, and observing the moves of the computer opponents is enlightening. If you're willing to put in some thinking time, START-UP 2000 is an enjoyable simulation and an education that won't cost you your life savings! *–Jeff Lackey*



BACKYARD BASEBALL 2001

Genre: Sports • **Publisher:** Humongous Entertainment • **Developer:** Humongous Sports • $20 • www.humongoussports.com • **ESRB Rating:** Everyone

What? The HIGH HEAT-loving baseball-grognards at *CGW* are even reviewing BACKYARD BASEBALL 2001? A kid's game? Well yes, yes we are, for one simple reason: It's a darn good baseball game, and a lot more fun than EA Sports' or Microsoft's entries into this year's derby. No, we're not giving up on our HIGH HEAT devotion, but BACKYARD BASEBALL 2001 translates a lot of the same baseball-loving spirit into PC gameplay that HIGH HEAT does. Plus, it's cute.

★★★★☆

So, if you've got a youngster in the house who you're trying to infect with the national pastime, BACKYARD BASEBALL can provide a game paced slow enough for them to absorb, but stringent enough in baseball rules and culture to establish the foundation for a future fanatic. Having the full MLB license means you can match up dream teams of pee-wee versions of your favorite real-life players. Pint-sized Ken Griffey Jr. (Junior Junior?), blasting one off the tool shed in right-center is as exciting as any one of his SportsCenter highlights. *–Tom Price*

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IT'S GREAT FOR FLYING AND DRIVING, BUT OTHER GAMES BENEFIT LESS

Does FSAA Make a Difference?

Many gamers have been heaping praise on full-scene anti-aliasing (FSAA), the technology that helps clean up jagged edges in 3D games. But not everyone is sold on it. While FSAA can improve the image quality in some games, it has little effect on others, and it often exacts a major performance penalty. This has led to a spirited debate as to FSAA's value, complicated by the fact that there are three different implementations of FSAA currently available, from 3dfx, nVidia, and ATI.

I decided to see for myself which titles benefit from FSAA and which ones don't. Using graphics cards from 3dfx, nVidia, and ATI, I tested one OpenGL and 15 Direct3D games that varied in genre and age. I looked at several older titles, because FSAA can really help clean up their image quality, as those titles often used lower-fidelity textures. What I found is that of the 16 games, FSAA made a difference in eight of them. And of those eight, there were five cases where 3dfx's FSAA worked better or didn't have compatibility issues.

by Dave Salvator

Whatever brand of FSAA you opt for, it is expensive in terms of processing power, video-memory bandwidth, and diminished space for texture caching. But there are cases where the benefit outweighs the cost. The chart below will help you identify which games and cards offer the best FSAA compatibility and image-quality improvements.

What Is FSAA?

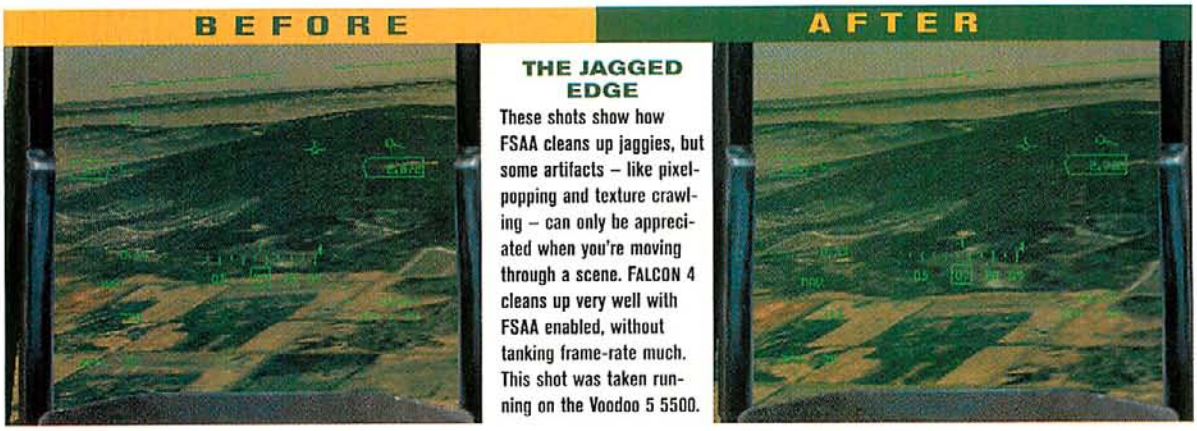
FSAA is a technique for cleaning up three principal image-quality problems: texture crawling, pixel popping, and jaggies. Texture crawling and pixel-popping are most visible in large 3D environments, like flight sims, driving titles, and some sports games. Textures on distant objects appear to crawl on the object as you move toward it. An example of pixel-popping would be the yard-line markers on a football game's playing field flickering on and off as the camera moved over the field. Jaggies is essentially the stair-stepping effect you see on lines or objects in a 3D world.

In our 3D card Slap-Down between 3dfx and nVidia (August), I told you that FSAA can do good things to image quality in games with large, open 3D environments, such as flight sims and driving titles. That hasn't changed. But its benefits can extend into some sports and 3D strategy games as well, though not all of them. Shooters do not lend themselves to FSAA, since it can tank frame-rate and introduce control latency into game performance, which spells certain death.

In presenting the 3D Slap-Down, I opted not to delve into deep detail about the different implementations of FSAA, but for the sake of alleviating confusion, here's how they work.

3dfx uses a technique called Rotated Grid Super-Sampling (RGSS), where a 3D scene is taken, and four "copies" of the scene are created. In creating these four copies, Voodoo 5 "jitters"—or slightly offsets the geometry—in these images in four different directions. Next, Voodoo 5 recombines the five images (original plus four offset copies) using an averaging algorithm, just before the image is sent to Voodoo 5's RAMDAC to be passed on to the monitor. This essentially has a blurring effect of smoothing jagged edges (jaggies), as well as curbing texture crawling and pixel-popping. 3dfx has two FSAA settings: 2X and 4X.

nVidia and ATI have implemented an FSAA technique called Ordered Grid Super-Sampling (OGSS), where the 3D scene is first taken, and blown up to a larger resolution—say, from 800x600 to 1600x1200 (2X for each dimension). In this case, there are now four times as many pixels on the screen, and each pixel from the original screen size now effectively has four "sub-pixels." These sub-pixels are averaged together, and the result is then drawn as the final pixel at the original 800x600 resolution. This particular example is called 4X FSAA, and nVidia's driver has eight differ-



THE JAGGED EDGE

These shots show how FSAA cleans up jaggies, but some artifacts – like pixel-popping and texture crawling – can only be appreciated when you're moving through a scene. FALCON 4 cleans up very well with FSAA enabled, without tanking frame-rate much. This shot was taken running on the Voodoo 5 5500.

ent settings, but the control panel does a poor job of explaining which setting does what. Also, the FSAA panel is buried in the driver control panel, and takes over ten mouse-clicks to get to. (For more on this, see the Tech Tip in this month's Tech Medics.) NVidia's FSAA works pretty well, but five titles had severe drawing errors in the menus, making them difficult to navigate. Though in three of the eight cases where FSAA was of benefit, nVidia's image quality was comparable to 3dfx's.



MOMMA MIA You can see where the HOMEWORLD mothership's edges clean up with FSAA turned on, and how some texture crawling goes away as well.

For its Radeon part, ATI has implemented only one FSAA setting, which is 4X for both Direct3D and OpenGL (see review on page 150). But ATI's Direct3D FSAA is currently so riddled with problems that you'd do better just leaving it disabled, and running at a higher resolution—something which ATI's Radeon does very well.

The Bottom Line

If most of your gaming involves flying or driving, you'll probably want FSAA. And 3dfx's FSAA has better compatibility than nVidia or ATI, and in a few cases noticeably better image quality. So, if you don't mind trading some performance for the feature (Voodoo 5 5500 is 13 percent slower than GeForce 2 GTS-based cards, and 5 percent slower than ATI's Radeon in 3D GameGauge performance with FSAA turned off), then you'll probably want to go with the Voodoo 5 5500.

But, if you spend most of your time playing shooters and RTS titles—and with few exceptions, these kinds of titles tend to be the best-sellers—FSAA won't do a lot for you, and will likely cost you more performance than you're willing to give up. 3dfx's upcoming Voodoo 5 6000—with its four VSA-100 graphics chips and $600 price tag—won't put you in the FSAA/frame-rate dilemma, but the Voodoo 5 5500 often does.

There are a number of cases where FSAA can have a dramatic effect on image quality. But in almost as many other cases, its improvements are more subtle, and in an informal straw poll of *CGW* editors, they sometimes couldn't tell the difference. This proved especially true in tactical sims. If you think FSAA will make a difference in your gaming, keep in mind that 3dfx's approach has a near 100 percent compatibility rate, something nVidia and ATI are now endeavoring to match.

What's more, it appears FSAA's importance will continue to grow, as evidenced by the fact that DirectX 8 will support a new FSAA technique. In the meantime, until we reach a point where the smooth frame-rate/smooth image-quality dilemma goes away, you'll have to pick and choose which titles you run with FSAA enabled. CGW

FSAA and Games: What's the Difference?

Game	Genre	3dfx Voodoo 5 5500	ELSA Gladiac GTS	ATI Radeon
Falcon 4	Flight Sim	Jaggies and texture crawling clean up nicely, though some detail is lost to blurriness	Some texture crawling cleans up, as do some jaggies, but some of both remain; frame-rate stayed playable	Default view: Cockpit had bad drawing errors and some melting effect. Virtual cockpit OK, as is no-cockpit view
Homeworld	3D RTS	Some texture cleanup, and edges are smoothed	Some texture crawling cleans up, as do some jaggies, but some of both remain; frame-rate stayed playable	Melting menus, both before and in-game, plus garbage on the side of the screen; mouse sluggish in in-game menus
High Heat 2001	Sports	Cleaned up jaggies, but 4X was unplayable, and 2X still introduced latency into the controller buttons when batting	Cleaned up texture crawling and most jaggies, but introduced latency into controller when batting	Bad overdraw on menus; navigation nearly impossible; jaggies mostly cleaned up except on baselines; frame-rate seems pokey
Jane's USAF	Flight Sim	Some cleanup of texture crawling, though difference is not substantial	Some cleanup of texture crawling, though difference is not substantial; there was a drawing error where part of a runway on final got overdrawn with a terrain texture	Garbage overdraw on the cockpit instruments; runway melted; noise near horizon; not usable at all
Motocross Madness 2	Driving	Shrubbery stopped "shimmering," slight cleanup of texture crawling	Menu overdraw errors; melting menus. But, texture crawling cleans up, and best of all, the shrubbery doesn't shimmer.	Bad menu-drawing errors, but game graphics do clean up – including a lack of the dreaded shrub-shimmering
Need for Speed III	Driving	Considerable texture and edge cleanup with little perceptible loss of frame-rate	Frame playable; some cleanup, but some jaggies remain	Frame playable; some cleanup, but some jaggies remain
Quake 3 Arena	Shooter	Frame-rate drops off considerably, with only some jaggie cleanup	Some improvement in jaggies, but not really noticeable, given the pace and type of game	Frame-rate drags, not a lot of image-quality improvement
Rogue Spear: Urban Ops	Tactical Sim	Some texture crawling goes away; slight smoothing of edges, though overall effect is not readily perceptible	Menu overdraw errors; melting menus. Edges and texture crawling clean up somewhat, but not that perceptible	Frame-rate tanked; menus at bottom of screen blurred and nearly illegible


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Under the Hood



BY DAVE SALVATOR

Force-Feedback Is a Bust

Why didn't force-feedback get into more gamers' hands?

It was one of those sublime, wonderfully unexpected moments of gaming. Coming off the first turn of the Hometown track in NEED FOR SPEED III, I hit a jump. The engine screamed. The car soared. And when I landed in a covered bridge, the combination of the impact of the landing, the groan of the car's suspension, and the rattle of the force-feedback wheel came together so seamlessly as to completely immerse me in that moment. And I said to myself, "Finally, a great game made greater by force-feedback."

For me, NFS3 remains one of the greatest force-feedback (FFB) titles ever created. Great, not just because the effects are convincing, but because they perfectly match the experience of tearing up the game's courses. The problem is, NFS3 ranks among games I can count on one hand whose FFB really adds to the experience. Sadly, many titles' FFB is more annoying than gratifying, and I wind up turning it off and using a non-FFB controller. It's very rare to ever see any *CGW* editor crank up an FFB controller for our in-office gaming.

So why has this technology, which showed so much promise, been relegated to afterthought by game designers, and considered a feature many gamers can live without? It's a combination of overpriced controllers that haven't sold especially well, along with the very small number of developers who have figured out how to make FFB effects gel with the rest of their game. Both Microsoft and Logitech are shipping new FFB joysticks this fall with lower price tags. But given how few games seem to need a joystick these days—let alone force-feedback—it may be a case of too little, too late.

Chicken, Egg. Egg, Chicken.

The classic uphill battle that all aspiring game technologies have faced is that of "platform vs. content." It goes something like this: A cool new technology comes along; the company championing it parades it around to game developers and to the gaming media, in the hope of getting developers to implement the tech in their upcoming games. Sounds simple enough, right? It's not, because game developers don't want to dedicate scarce development resources to enable a technology that doesn't have a large installed base. And gamers don't want to buy a new technology if no games support it. Seems like a Catch-22, but several now-common technologies have stormed this beachhead and broken through. How did they do it? In 3D graphics' case, the technology was such a quantum leap in visual quality over what came before it, that 3D graphics sparked a revolution. Positional audio made its way through, albeit with less fanfare, because a sound card is a must-have part of any system, and because a little company called Aureal caught the giant (Creative Labs) napping. But, after Creative awoke from its slumber, it brought its industry weight and deep pockets to bear, and put 3D audio into every sound card it made.

So where did force-feedback get derailed on the road to acceptance? It hit several pitfalls along the way: Most FFB controllers have been well over $100, and given the paucity of great FFB titles, it never broke out of the Catch-22. More importantly, I think it was the lack of the mystical X-factor that makes gamers *have to have* something, like an insidious pleasure fix where after you've had it once, there's just no going back. Yes, the technology has had its shining moments, but it never gained the momentum to solidify its place in the gaming universe.

Programming force-feedback that transports us into a sublime gaming moment is a difficult craft, one that may soon become a lost art.

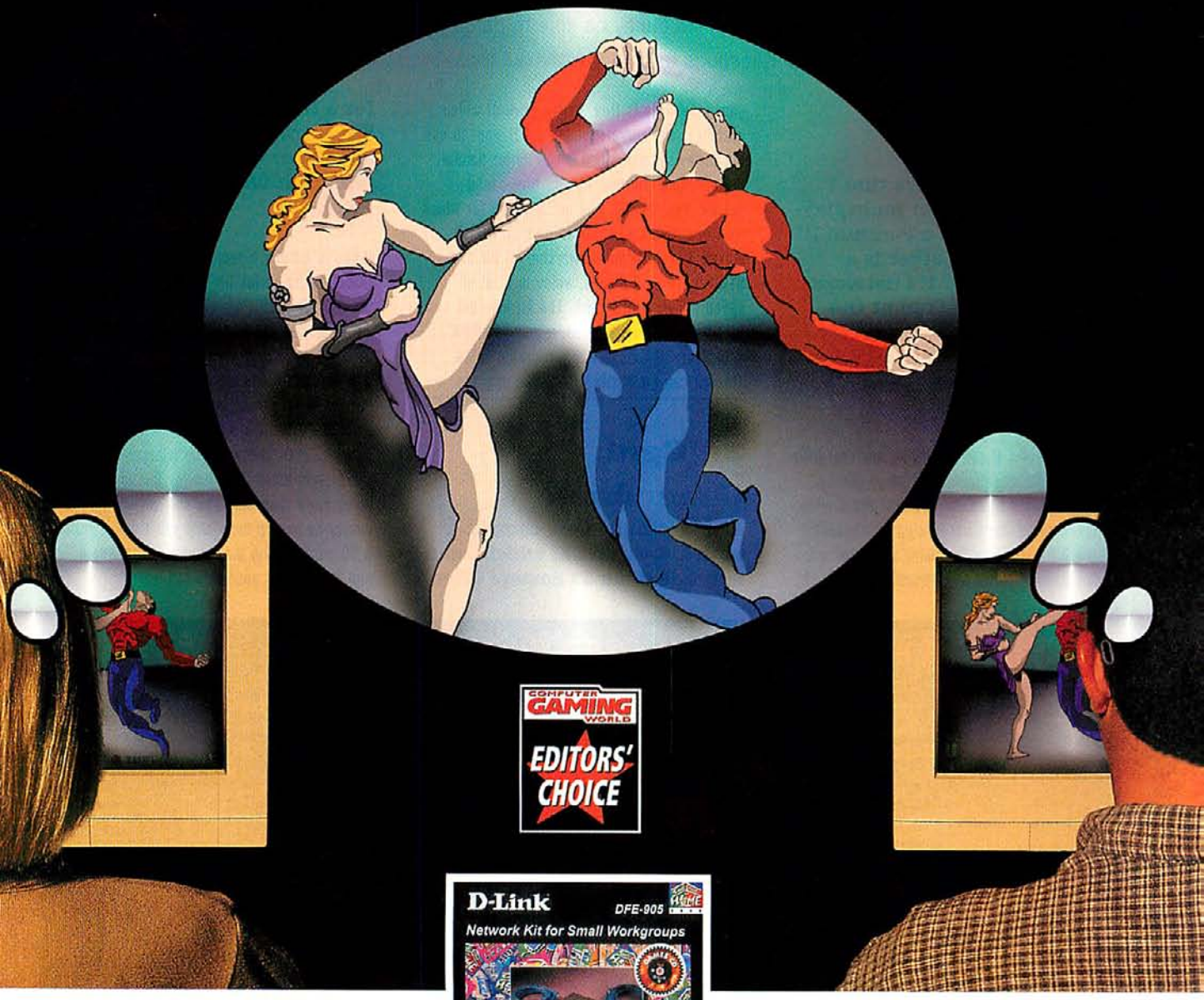
3D graphics had QUAKE, positional audio had THIEF, and FFB has had several titles with great effects. But the deeper truth may be that doing great FFB that transports us into that sublime gaming moment is a difficult craft, and given how its failures outnumber its successes, this technology may be riding off into the sunset.

So Now What?

Is there still hope for force-feedback? Maybe. One realm that hasn't been explored with force-feedback is sports titles. Gravis and Logitech will have an FFB gamepad on the market this fall, and ACT Labs has their HammerHead FX gamepad that has some basic FFB effects. Any sport that involves physical contact might be enhanced by adding force-feedback effects to the mix, so that when you get hip-checked into a wall in NHL 2001, you've got to physically contend with your controller in addition to the loss of the puck. It's kind of a long shot, and unless EA decides it's something worth doing, it probably won't see the light of day. Given the current crisis in flight sims, and the relative dearth of driving titles, force-feedback's future isn't looking too bright.

So, what do you think? Is force-feedback already history, or is it just a slow starter whose glory days are still ahead of it? Let me know at cgw_hardware@ziff-davis.com. CGW

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Tech Medics



You've Got Questions, We've Got Answers

by Dave Salvator

Wounded on the technological front? Our medic may be able to patch you up and get you back into the action. Send your gaming-related technical questions to **cgw_hardware@ziffdavis.com**.

Head-to-Head Hookup

I have two computers that I want to network for multiplayer gaming. One is a Pentium-III 600MHz, and the other is a Pentium 200MHz. If I network them, will games run at the speed of the faster computer or the slower computer? What type of networking cards do you recommend?

Well, it depends. If you're playing any real-time games — and these include strategy games, shooters, sports titles, flight sims, and driving games — the game's networking multiplayer "engine" has to keep gameplay synchronized, so the slower system will "throttle" your gameplay. This is true, irrespective of which system is the server; though you'll want to use the faster system, since it can better handle the additional burden. But for turn-based games, this shouldn't be an issue. As for which type of networking cards to look at, D-Link makes a great home networking kit for under $100 that's 100 Base-T, which is a lot of speed for very little cash. The kit includes two 100 Base-T network cards, a four-port hub, and plenty of Category 5 networking cable. This kit can grow with you as you upgrade.

3D Card Conundrum

I am getting a new computer with a Riva 128ZX, which I can upgrade to an S3 Savage 4 Pro for a total (with the Savage) of $1,500. Should I buy it with the Savage or with the Riva, then replace it with a Hercules Prophet II?

If you're getting a speedy CPU (600MHz or faster), then go for the added horsepower that the Hercules' 3D Prophet II can deliver. Find out from your system builder how much the baseline system is (with the Riva 128ZX), and how much it would cost to upgrade to the 3D Prophet II. At press time, the 3D Prophet II with 32MB of DDR memory was hovering around $260 (check www.pricewatch.com). If the system builder's price for the upgrade is much more than that, you can save some money by having them ship you the PC without a 3D card, buying the Prophet II elsewhere, and installing it yourself.

TECHTIP nVidia's Mystery FSAA Slider, Explained

3dfx's Full Scene Anti-aliasing (FSAA) control panel is straightforward, but Nvidia's is a different story. Here's how to tweak all of GeForce's and GeForce 2 GTS' FSAA settings:



In OpenGL, nVidia has three settings:

- 2x anti-aliasing with the back buffer at 2.25x screen resolution (default setting).
- 4x anti-aliasing, with MIP Maps at the native game resolution (back buffer is 4x screen resolution).
- 4x screen resolution with MIP Maps at the 4x resolution (back buffer is 4x screen resolution).

There's no slider for changing the OpenGL AA settings, and the only way to tweak them is to edit the Registry.

So, open RegEdit (Start → Run... → regedit), and find the following key:

\HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE\System\CurrentControlSet\Services\Class\Display\000x\Nvidia\OpenGL

Create a DWORD value called FSAAQuality. The default is 0 (2x mode). A value of 1 is 4x mode, and a value of 2 is 4x mode with high-quality MIP Maps.

For Direct3D's FSAA settings, use the slider bar found in the driver's control panel. It's buried; right-click on the Desktop, and select Properties. Go to the GeForce or GeForce 2 GTS tab and click on Additional Properties. Select the Direct3D Settings tab and click on the More Direct3D button toward the bottom. From here, select the Anti-aliasing tab, and you're there. Here are the settings for the mystery slider (from left to right).

- AA Off (left-most setting).
- 2x anti-aliasing (back buffer is 2x screen resolution).
- 4x anti-aliasing with MIP Maps at the native game resolution (back buffer is 4x screen resolution).
- 4x anti-aliasing with MIP Maps at the back-buffer (higher) resolution (back buffer is 4x screen resolution).
- 4x anti-aliasing with MIP Maps at the native game resolution (back buffer is 4x screen resolution). A Gaussian filtering is applied to improve image quality.
- 9x anti-aliasing with MIP Maps at the native game resolution (back buffer is 9x screen resolution).
- 9x anti-aliasing with MIP Maps at the back-buffer (higher) resolution (back buffer is 9x screen resolution). Note that 32MB cards may not be able to run in this mode, because they run out of memory. 9x mode means that the back buffer on a 640x480 image is running at 1920x1440.

Our experience with GeForce 2 GTS cards has been that using the fourth or fifth setting gets good results without tanking frame-rate too badly. The last two settings will probably kill frame-rate, but play with them and let me know if they work for you.

I don't know really how to say this, but I had a few doubts about the buzz on your new RADEON™ gamer boards. I checked out your so-called RADEON™ GPU with its integrated T&L acceleration and ultra-fast DDR to speed up my Quake™ III Arena framerates. Not only does RADEON™ have awesome high-quality performance but it supports more advanced 3D games and upcoming DirectX™ 8.0 features than any other graphics board. The DVD playback feature will come in handy when I need to take a break from gaming. And, I have to admit the video capture and TV-output option on RADEON™ 64MB DDR makes it a must-have. But, just remember, the only opinion of RADEON™ that matters is mine and I have only one thing to say to you ATI

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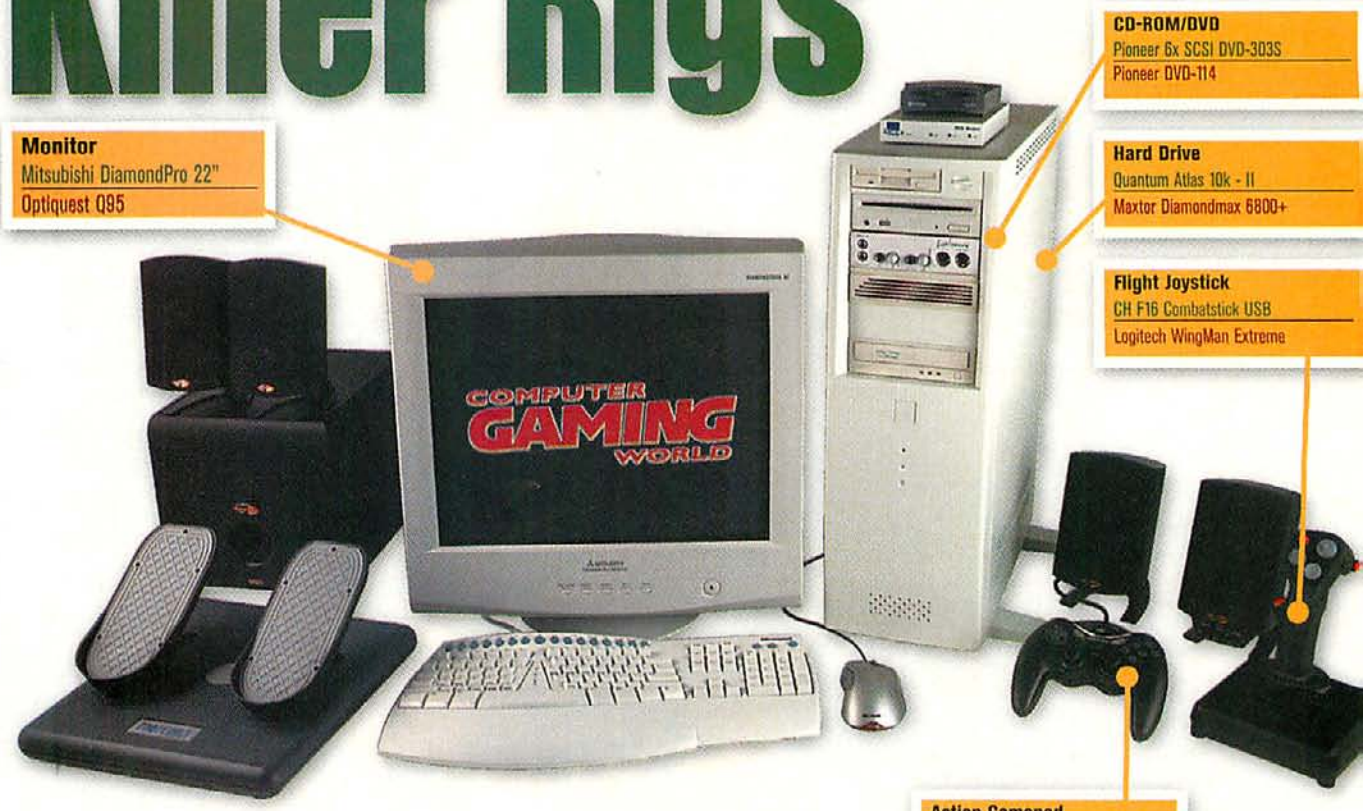
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YOUR TWO BEST RECIPES FOR BUILDING THE ULTIMATE GAMING MACHINE

Killer Rigs



Power Rig

Component	Manufacturer	Price	The Skinny
YY Minicube case	Yeong Yang	$213	Lots of cooling
Motherboard	Asus P3C-E	$180	AGP 4X, Intel 820, RAMBUS
CPU	Intel Pentium-III 933	$770	OK, not a Gigahertz, but at least you can buy it
NEW **Memory**	**256MB of PC800 RDRAM**	**$700**	**Up from 128MB**
Disk Controller	Adaptec 29160	$185	Slightly faster, but also PCI 64 support
Primary Graphics	Hercules 3D Prophet II 64MB	$340	DDR SDRAM and T&L support
3.5" Floppy Drive	Teac	$20	You still have to have one
Hard Drive	Quantum Atlas 10k - II	$830	Now at 36GB
Backup	Creative DVD-RAM drive	$270	5.2 gigs of backup
CD-ROM	Pioneer 6x SCSI DVD-303S	$135	New Pioneer Slot-Drive DVD
Monitor	Mitsubishi DiamondPro 22" Monitor	$1,150	Perfectly flat; good USB support
Primary Audio	Sound Blaster Live Platinum	$160	For four-speaker DirectSound, A3D, and EAX
Speakers	Boston Acoustics BA4800	$175	Loud, clean, uncolored sound
Networking	3COM Etherlink 10/100 PCI	$40	Reach out and frag someone
Networking Hub	Netgear DS108	$95	Multiplayer & DSL modem support
Power Supply	PC Power and Cooling Turbocool 300	$99	More power, Scotty!
Keyboard	Microsoft Natural Keyboard Pro	$59	Natural in, Newtouch out
Mouse/Pointing Device	Microsoft IntelliMouse Explorer	$60	No balls!
USB Hub	Logitech WingMan 7-port USB Hub	$79	Get them USB ports upstairs
		Total w/o Game Controllers	**$5,560**
Flight Joystick	CH F16 Combatstick USB	$65	It just feels right
Rudder Pedals	CH Pro Pedals USB	$100	Nearly perfect foot placement
Driving Controls	ECCI CDS 4000	$1,250	For the serious sim driver
Gamepad	Interact Hammerhead FX	$40	DualShock-like, force-feedback controller
		Total	**$6,975**

The Fine Print: All recommendations based on actual evaluations and testing. Prices listed are average low quotes from Web price search engines like **www.computershopper.com** or **www.pricewatch.com**. Lists compiled by Dave Salvator.

Lean Machine

Component	Manufacturer
Motherboard	ASUS K7V
CPU	AMD Duron 700 w/ cooling fan
Memory	128MB PC133 SDRAM
Disk Controller	Built-in UDMA/33
Primary Graphics	Hercules 3D Prophet
Floppy Drive	Teac
Hard Drive	Maxtor Diamondmax 6800 Plus 10.2GB drive
CD-ROM/DVD	Pioneer DVD-114
Monitor	Optiquest Q95
Primary Audio	Sound Blaster Value
Speakers	Boston Acoustics BA-635
Modem	Actiontec PCI Call-Waiting Modem
Case	Elan Vital T10-AB
Power Supply	Antec 300W
Keyboard	Microsoft Internet Keyboard
Mouse/Pointing Device	Logitech USB Wheel Mouse
Joystick	Logitech WingMan Extreme Digital

KILLER RIGS IN A BOX

Want a full-bore gaming beast without having to build it? We've got you covered. These two systems tested very well, and will put you into the fray without your ever having to charge up the electric screwdriver.



Power Rig

Alienware's Area 51 Aurora took no prisoners in our recent testing, and its latest AMD Athlon-based rig pushes the CPU speed up to 1GHz. The Aurora packs 256MB of PC133 SDRAM for system memory, a GeForce 2 GTS-based 3D card with 64MB of DDR SDRAM, and Klipsch's testicular four-channel ProMedia V.2-400 speakers. The rig's all-black components give it a menacing look to match its performance.

Alienware's Area 51 Aurora ■ $3,935 as configured ■ www.alienware.com



Lean Machine

Falcon Northwest has long made its reputation on building gaming rigs from the "bat out of hell" school. But Falcon has launched a line of value-minded boxes that will serve the budget-minded gamer as well. Dubbed Talon, these boxes can be custom-ordered, but the $1,749 stock load-out includes an Athlon 750MHz CPU, 128MB of PC133 SDRAM, a Hercules 3D Prophet II (GeForce 2) graphics card, Sound Blaster Live Value, and a 15GB ATA-66 hard drive. With a 17" monitor and Cambridge's PC Works speakers, this box will get you going and deliver a lot of punch for the price.

Falcon Northwest's Talon ■ $1,749 as configured ■ www.falcon-nw.com

THE PROCESSOR REPORT

1GHz Pentium-III CPUs are still in short supply, so we stuck with the 933MHz chip for our Power Rig. Even Dell has a two-week delay delivering 1GHz systems. But given that the 1GHz CPUs are only about 7% faster than the 933MHz CPU we recommend, you're not losing that much.

In the Lean Machine, we've opted for AMD's new Duron, the "value edition" of the Athlon, which – like Intel's Celeron processor – has a 128KB onboard Level-2 cache. But unlike Celeron, AMD didn't "dumb down" the system-memory bus interface to 66MHz to create an arbitrary product niche. Duron has the same 200MHz front-side bus as Athlon, and can talk to PC133 system memory. And like its Athlon sibling, AMD's Duron also has 64KB Level-1 cache. Moving the L2 onboard should make for some incremental performance improvements.

At press time, Duron 700MHz chips were about $30 bucks cheaper than Athlon 750MHz chips, which – coupled with Duron's onboard L2 – compelled us to make the move.

We've also switched over to a KX133-based motherboard, both for the gain in system memory speed (1.1GB/sec peak), and for the move to AGP 4X. *–Dave Salvator*

Price	The Skinny
$135	Solid, stable KX133 Athlon motherboard
$155	Onboard L2, and a little cheaper than Athlon
$130	128MB, squeezed in
$0	It's in there
$130	Solid GeForce SDRAM card
$20	Still gotta have it
$130	Fast and cheap
$155	Slot-drive DVD
$300	Solid 19" monitor at a budget price
$35	R.I.P. Aureal
$60	Best sub-$100 speakers, period.
$70	Solid performance, good price
$75	Back to the old familiar
$49	Drunk with power
$24	Cheap; nice add-on buttons
$30	Better than the "gaming" mouse
$39	Very solid 3D joystick with USB
Total	**$1,537**



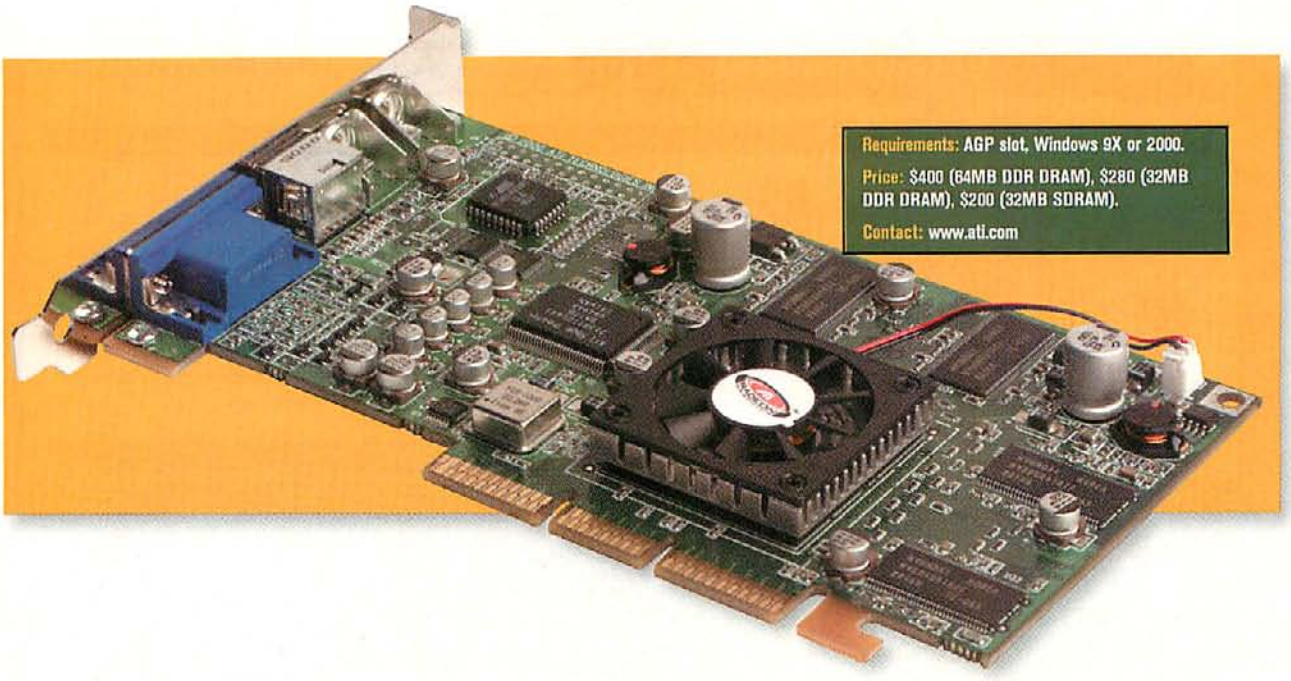
Choosing the right 3D card depends on your CPU and your motherboard, so we have two recommendations for you:

For a Pentium 233MHz or slower, or a PCI motherboard (no AGP), or a motherboard-down AGP graphics chip with no AGP slot, get 3dfx's Voodoo3 3000 PCI board. At around $120, the V3 3000 delivers good price/performance, and will do a good job with current games. And, when you swap in a new motherboard/CPU, you can continue to use the Voodoo3 in the new setup until you decide to get an AGP-based card.

For motherboards with AGP, we recommend Hercules' 3D Prophet II, based on nVidia's GeForce 2 GTS chipset. This board comes with 32MB or 64MB of DDR SDRAM, either of which will more than meet your needs. If your monitor can tolerate it, try running your favorite game at 1600x1200: Prepare to be amazed. If you can't handle $310 for the 32MB version, look at its celebrated predecessor, the GeForce-based 3D Prophet. By now, the GeForce cards should be dropping below $200.

Movin' On Up

ATI aims for the top, and comes close



Until recently, ATI has been comfortable in the middle of the 3D pack. With its high-volume, low-cost parts, ATI's chips make their way into corporate and low-cost boxes that have made ATI the number one volume graphics chipmaker. But with its new Radeon card, ATI is gunning for 3D leaders 3dfx and nVidia, and judging from its performance, Radeon (no, not the noxious gas the government has warned you about) has come to play.

The Radeon chip is ATI's first part with accelerated transform and lighting (T&L), and according to ATI, its Charisma engine can process 30 million polygons/second, vs. GeForce 2's polygon rate of between 20-25 million polygons/second. In addition, Radeon's architecture is optimally designed to handle multitexturing effects in games like QUAKE III, since it can process two pixels per cycle and three textures per pixel.

On paper, GeForce 2 GTS's specifications easily outpace the Radeon (GeForce 2's 1.6Gtexels/sec versus Radeon's 1Gtexel/sec). But in our testing at 1600x1200x32 with 3D WinBench 2000 and QUAKE 3 ARENA, ATI's Radeon was more than 20 percent faster than GeForce 2 GTS on both of these tests. In addition, Radeon's 3D WinBench 2000 score was the fastest we've ever seen, and it also stacked up well for 2D performance. In terms of raw 3D GameGauge performance, Radeon lands between Voodoo 5 5500 and GeForce 2 GTS, though most of its individual game frame-rates are closer to the latter.

Out of the Box

To differentiate itself from the pack, ATI has implemented several unique features in Radeon, including their proprietary Hyper-Z technology, which ATI says reduces the amount of data sent to the frame buffer. ATI looked for ways to reduce video-memory traffic, because "brute force" 3D chips with multiple pipelines working in parallel tend to hammer video-memory bandwidth, particularly at higher resolutions like 1600x1200.

ATI has historically delivered good hardware but often-shaky drivers, which had to be fixed with subsequent versions. But Radeon's 1.0 drivers burned through our tests with few complaints, at least until we turned on its full-scene antialiasing (FSAA). Radeon implements a very complicated FSAA setting choice: on or off. In both Direct3D and OpenGL, ATI is doing 4X ordered-grid super-sampling, very similar to nVidia's. And while nVidia's FSAA has some problems of "melting" menus and in-game drawing errors, ATI's FSAA rendered most games nearly unplayable. We looked at 16 games (15 Direct3D, one OpenGL), and ATI's FSAA caused problems in all but five of them. So, if you're a flight sim fan or driving fan who wants FSAA, this is not the best choice in 3D cards.

But, in terms of raw 3D performance, ATI was hot on the heels of nVidia, and in the case of high-resolution 32-bit-color tests, was well in front. As for T&L performance, nVidia was ahead on two of the three 3D WinBench 2000 tests we ran to look at this performance. But, ATI was neck and neck with nVidia on a QUAKE 3 ARENA map designed with very high triangle count to show off what T&L can do (you can get this map on nVidia's Web site).

★★★★

PROS

Very good high-resolution 3D performance; good transform & lighting performance.

CONS

Broken FSAA on nearly every game tested.

Overall, Radeon is certainly competitive with nVidia's GeForce 2 GTS and 3dfx's Voodoo 5 5500. The card's FSAA won't make it any friends, but if that's a feature you can live without, Radeon will power your gaming at very high resolutions.

But appreciate that the 64MB DDR version of Radeon loads out with chip/memory clock rates of 183MHz/183MHz, whereas the 32MB DDR and SDRAM Radeon cards clock at 166MHz/166MHz, so their performance will be slower.



Product photos by Hayden Houser/DIGITAL CLARITY

LOGITECH WINGMAN FORCE 3D

Requirements: USB or joystick port.
Price: $60
Contact: www.logitech.com

The WingMan Force 3D seems like a slam-dunk. Take a superbly designed and sturdily built joystick from one of the industry's premier controller makers, add force-feedback, and push it out the door for under $60. At least, we thought it sounded good when we heard Logitech was developing a force feedback stick based on their excellent WingMan Extreme design. But alas, the attractive price point translates into less-than-cutting-edge feedback effects.

Because the design didn't really change, we can't fault the grip, which is very comfortable despite its angular looks. The feel of the original WingMan Extreme was tight without being too stiff, but the inclusion of force-feedback necessitates a slacker stick for the WingMan Force 3D. It tightens up when playing, but the feel just isn't the same. It's good for space sims and other "flying" games (we had a blast playing our CRIMSON SKIES beta with it), but less than stellar with motorcycle games, although it does come bundled with CASTROL HONDA SUPERBIKE WORLD CHAMPIONS. If you're considering trading in your WingMan Extreme, don't. Not for this stick, anyway. *–Tom Price*

GAMECOMMANDER MX

Requirements: 133MHz Pentium; 32MB RAM; 10MB free hard drive space; Windows 95/98-compatible, full-duplex sound card.
Price: $40
Contact: www.mindmaker.com

GameCommander MX is a marriage of technologies. Wedded here are in-game voice-command recognition and voice-over-IP apps like Roger Wilco.

Following the directions provided by Mindmaker (yes, you really should read them), I had both programs working together in a game of COMBAT FLIGHT SIMULATOR in under two minutes. GameCommander MX has a pass-through that can be configured for the same key you use to activate the mic in your game. When you want to talk to your friends, just hit your mic key as usual. Or, if you usually run in voice-activated mode, you can toggle between the two voice apps with a hotkey, or hold a hotkey down while you issue GameCommander orders.

The voice-recognition engine in GameCommander is really fast, with almost no delay between saying a command and seeing it carried out on screen. The accuracy is also very high, and unless I'm weeping or screaming, it usually gets it right on the first pass. Because of the time savings it affords, GameCommander can definitely give you an edge. Keyboard maps? You've got to be kidding. But with voice control, the right key is just a spoken word away.

Given how GameCommander MX frees you from hunt-and-peck, its brain-dead simple setup, and its ability to play nice with voice-over-IP apps, this is $40 well spent. *–Greg Fortune*

POLKAUDIO AMR70 SPEAKERS

Price: $80
Contact: www.polkaudio.com

PolkAudio knows speakers, but has only dipped its toes into PC waters, making very low-end speakers for HP Pavilion systems. Following its early foray, Polk has returned with a line of four-speaker sets. The AMR70s are in the middle of this line, and deliver surprising amounts of clean volume despite their modest spec's – 22 watts continuous average RMS of amp power, satellites with 3" shielded drivers, and a bass unit with a 4" shielded driver. Despite the good volume and relatively uncolored tonal quality, the AMR70s cut some corners, and their unnatural imaging produces listener fatigue.

The AMR70s setup is painless enough, with no convoluted wiring schemes. But they do arrive with the dreaded wall-wart power supply, and no headphone jack. Additionally, no matter what audio CD I tried, there was always a "spatializer" effect that made me want to stop listening. Spatializer effects artificially widen the sound field and are sometimes useful for PC speakers where the satellites tend to be close together. Game audio sounded much better.

If you don't listen to CDs on your PC, these are solid speakers that crank out clean game audio, but the wall-wart power supply and lack of headphone jack are a pain. If you also listen to music, check out Boston Acoustics BA-635s, which sound better and cost about $20 less.
–Dave Salvator

MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER

BY THOMAS L. MCDONALD cgwletters@ziffdavis.com

Building a Better Online RPG

ATRIARCH LEADS THE NEW WAVE OF GRASSROOTS GAMES

As new and exciting as the world of massively-multiplayer games is, there is already a whiff of staleness in the air, thanks largely to a string of fantasy RPGs that all plumb similar *Tolkein*-esque turf. There's nothing wrong with the traditional FRPG, which has proven to have a large and dedicated core audience. But if someone new wants to compete against the likes of EVERQUEST, ASHERON'S CALL, and ULTIMA ONLINE, they better be mighty different—and it's hard to imagine something more different than ATRIARCH.

All of the MMRPGs that have splashed to date have come from large companies with plenty of cash to invest in building and troubleshooting complex net code. The new wave, however, seems to come from the exact opposite direction, with titles such as ANARCHY ONLINE, SHADOWBANE, and ATRIARCH emerging from grassroots designers. Companies like Funcom, Wolfpack, and World Fusion have varying levels of experience, but all are approaching their MMRPGs with an aggressive desire to distinguish themselves from the pack, none more so than ATRIARCH.

ATRIARCH (**www.atriarch.com**) has been a two-year labor of love for World Fusion President and Lead Designer Serafina Pechan, with a rollout due some time next year. The money her company has made over the last 14 years as a programmer of massive multi-user software for the likes of Sun (they were responsible for the implementation of Java 3D for Direct3D), Visa, Bellsouth, and others has been pumped back into ATRIARCH—which is now their sole, all-consuming obsession. Their long history of programming netcode puts them in an interesting position to launch an MMRPG.

"If we were working with a major company or looking for a publisher from the beginning," observes Pechan, "we would have begun with the glitz—the graphics, the combat engine—and then gone back to work on the multi-user technology. We went the other way, creating one layer of complexity and testing it, then adding another and another. By the time we release, we will have the most stable and well-balanced game possible, with the least amount of complexity and greatest amount of features. We can host a single world, or multiple worlds the size of the Earth's solar system, and never once need to a hit a zone or any artificial boundary. We can host a world with as many gamers as will physically fit on the planet."

The game itself is a science/fantasy/role-playing game with an emphasis on construction and character development. "From the beginning, I designed ATRIARCH to integrate elements of three gameplay genres: roleplaying, strategy, and empire building," says Pechan. "The reason they work well together is because they weren't thought of as separate games, but rather as a natural extension of each other, like they would be in the real world. The difference with ATRIARCH is that it gives players a degree of freedom to impact the world that will provide the most immersive and fulfilling online experience possible. A player has the power to affect the story, the environment, the politics, economy, and ecosystem for themselves and for other players."

Further distinguishing ATRIARCH is its complex alien world, which is a far cry from the elves and trolls of most MMRPGs. World Fusion has created an alien planet with a wide array of organic life forms, none of them human. The player-character can be developed in myriad ways, with players able to determine appearance, clothing, skills, and other characteristics, as well as to change the environment itself by building structures. Each character exists in the world at all times, with safe places for characters to hide and continue to learn skills when the player is offline.

This is one of the grassroots titles that will define the shape of massively-multiplayer gaming in 2001. We've already seen what massively-multiplayer gaming can be. Now it's up to the indies to take it in new directions.



There are no human characters in ATRIARCH, so gamers play as one of five different races. On the left is a Tyrusin scratching its head, while a Cavolon inspects a tentacle nearby.

Age II: Conquerors page 161



Behind the Scenes at Raven page 163



Hasbro Goes Racing page 157



MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER

A Whole New Fortress

TEAM FORTRESS 2: Starting Over?

TOM'S MIX

1. Warlords: Battlecry
2. Counter-Strike
3. Dark Reign 2
4. James Bond Special Edition DVDs
5. Green Eggs and Ham by Dr. Suess

■■■ Valve isn't talking about TEAM FORTRESS 2 right now, but one thing is certain: It's really, really late, and it's not about to arrive any time soon. There's one very good reason: Valve has decided to convert to a new graphics engine. They have scrapped the QUAKE 2 engine and are reportedly moving to a new custom-built system. This could still yield the stellar product we are expecting, but it will also create further delays. Both DAIKATANA and DUKE NUKEM FOREVER converted mid-stream to new engines, and the results couldn't have been worse. DAIKATANA never recovered (though it could be argued that there was nothing to recover) and DNF has fallen off the map.

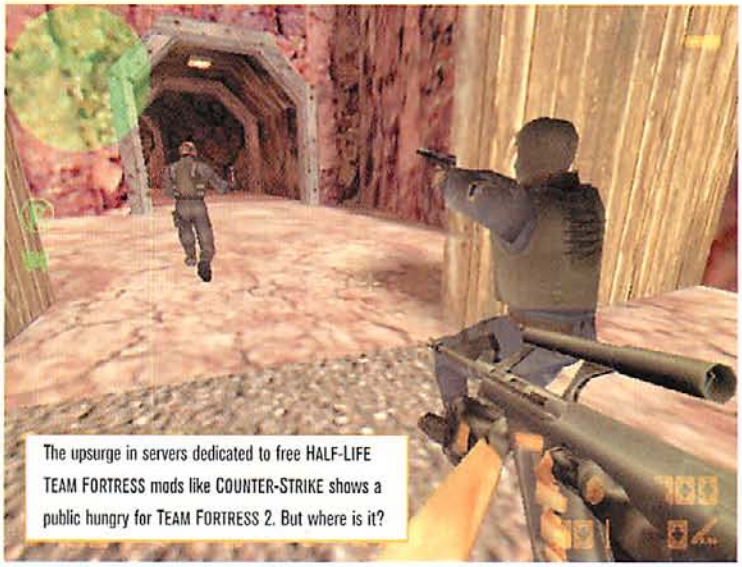
No matter how long Valve has been working on this new engine, there is going to be a huge implementation and testing curve. Valve tweaked QUAKE 2 so much and so well, there was almost no id code left in the thing. They've gone from working with clean, known technology to something untested and unknown. If they were worried about keeping up with the Joneses, a licensed engine would have been more expeditious. As it is, TF2 – and by extension, HALF-LIFE 2 – just fell down the rabbit hole, and we have no way of knowing where, when, or how they'll emerge.

In the meantime, Valve has earned the smoldering ire of the TEAM FORTRESS community by issuing a TF patch that ruined the game for many. One goal of the patch was to improve performance to high-ping clients by shifting the burden for position prediction from the server to the client. This essentially means that a high-ping player can see and hit a predicted position of a target; a low-ping player can see the predicted position, but only hit the real position. This effectively screws low-ping targeting and leaves you firing at something that is no longer there. To compound the problem, the patch over-writes CFG files without asking, and fudges weapon accuracy – perhaps as a concession to the quirks of the new code.

Is this a step toward PowerPlay, the new Internet gaming standard spearheaded by Cisco? If so, it bodes ill. It's also puzzling, since the future of the Internet, and especially Internet gaming, is in broadband; the new TF patch panders to the 56K crowd at the expense of the broadband player. While we think games should be playable across dial-up connections, it's pretty clear that the hardcore online-game community is almost entirely cable and xDSL customers. Nothing ruins a high-speed session faster than a 56Ker.

These problems – coupled with the continued popularity of counter-terrorism mods like COUNTER-STRIKE and STRIKE FORCE for UNREAL TOURNAMENT – are casting a bit of a pall over the most widely-hyped online action title of the last two years.

Editor's Note: Valve Software was contacted for this story, but declined to comment.



The upsurge in servers dedicated to free HALF-LIFE TEAM FORTRESS mods like COUNTER-STRIKE shows a public hungry for TEAM FORTRESS 2. But where is it?

Online Gambling Laws: Bad for Gamers?

■■■ "Gaming" means a very different thing to the reader of *CGW* and to the average Las Vegas visitor. Outside of our niche, gaming is a nice word for "gambling," and encompasses everything from casino games to horse and sports betting. It didn't take long for gaming to expand online, where cyber casinos allow you to gamble for real money. Unlike "real" casinos, online casinos aren't subjected to industry regulation and scrutiny, and their mostly offshore bases make this impractical.

Equally impractical is banning them, since Congress still has no authority outside of America. But that's not stopping them. The Internet Gambling Prohibition Act (H.R. 3125) bans all online "gaming," and will further sink federal hooks into the Internet. The legislation is backed by the usual moral watchdogs like the Family Research Council and Focus on the Family. Barring a delay, the House may already have voted on H.R. 3125 by the time you read this, but that still leaves the Senate. (Find out the status at **www.capweb.net/iccc.**) You may not care about Internet gambling. You may even think it's dangerous. But as an Internet gamer, do you want to surrender more rights? The language of this legislation is vague enough to allow abuse down the line that could wind up effecting online gaming. Combine laws against Internet gambling with attacks on violent computer/video games, and you set the stage for an erosion of civil liberties and rights of computer gamers.

We're on precarious ground here. People don't see much value in a lot of what we find entertaining. They find it, and by extension us, dangerous. If they can scare enough people, they can burrow into our lives with intrusive laws. Today, they come for the gambling Web sites. Tomorrow, the QUAKE servers. You can bet on that.

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- PC World

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- ZDNET GameSpot

"Amazing to use"
- Computer Gaming World

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- GameVisions.com



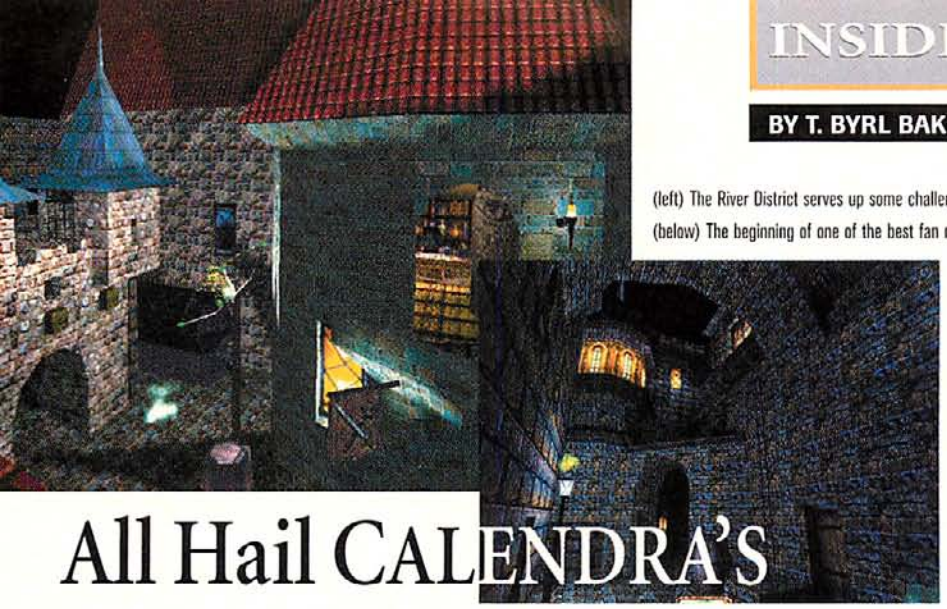
GameSpot March 2000 · Gamecenter March 2000 · The Control Center January 2000 · PowerSims December 1999 · AVSIM Online · Sim-Arena July 1999 · CombatSim June 1999

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BY T. BYRL BAKER tbbaker@email.com



(left) The River District serves up some challenging jumps.

(below) The beginning of one of the best fan missions ever produced. The store is in the tower to the right.

T. BYRL'S MIX

1. Combat Mission
2. Diablo 2
3. More Combat Mission
4. Devo's Pioneers Who Got Scalped anthology
5. Dreaming of Babylon by Richard Brautigan

All Hail CALENDRA'S CISTERN

AWESOME ADD-ONS FOR THIEF AND COMBAT MISSION

I'm literally surrounded by shiny boxes full of new games, from DEUS EX to SHOGUN: TOTAL WAR, but for nearly a week now the only game I've been playing is the original THIEF. What would cause a game addict to play a game that is nearly three years old, when the new stuff is beckoning? Two words: CALENDRA'S CISTERN. Over a year in the making, this massive mission combines all the great tricks I've seen in other fan missions, integrates them into an eminently enjoyable whole, and stretches the THIEF engine to the point where I must constantly remind myself that I'm not playing a THIEF 2 mission.

That the compressed download is over 30MB is the first indicator of the amount of work that went into this project. Taffers willing to brave the download time will be treated to a full opening video narrated by Garrett's new love interest, Mercedes. Finish the mission, and you'll be rewarded with a similarly well-produced epilogue video. You can forsake the videos to shave off some download time, but the mission itself still weighs in at 14MB (nearly 50MB when uncompressed!).

It's worth it. From the moment the mission loaded, I was in awe. Should the tired THIEF engine be able to look this good? The architecture is amazing, and looks even better thanks to all the impressive new textures Team Calendra added. Bricks and stones look especially good, but there are also plenty of new rugs, pictures (which can be stolen), beautiful stained-glass windows, and doorways that make this mission look like nothing you've played before. There are more than a dozen new high-quality skins for the cast of characters that populate the game, from the fainting Lord Wimple in his bunny-rabbit jammies to a bellowing four-eyed beast.

All these new characters come with their own sound files, with THIEF community legend Loanstar providing voices for Garrett and most of the others. The conversations that take place, along with the various scrolls and books found along the way, help build the mission's storyline in a way few other levels have.

The mission plays as well as it looks and sounds. The streets of the enormous city Team Calendra modeled are mostly bare for the first part of the level, encouraging exploration over sneakiness. I was stuck within ten minutes of playing, until I looked skyward and discovered CALENDRA'S CISTERN is a level designed for roof running. My mouse hand was pouring sweat from all the daring leaps I had to make. Sometimes the environment feels a little too contrived—since events have to happen in a certain order for the story to make sense—but the tradeoff is ultimately worth it.

Technically, CALENDRA'S CISTERN is brilliant. There's a working store where players can trade their stolen loot for equipment (get rope arrows immediately). There's a safe with a combination lock, scripted events like a massive mage showdown, and a seamless integration of new sound and environmental effects. It's a masterfully crafted level so full of surprises, that there's a great debate raging over whether it should receive the elusive Gold Hammer award at the The Circle of Stone and Shadow fan site, meaning it's better than the best missions that came with the original game. I'd say it's easily on par with those missions, and it's a great tribute to the now-defunct Looking Glass Studios. You can see for yourself by downloading the mission at **www.thief-thecircle.com.**

5-star wargame gets mod reinforcements

COMBAT MISSION Makeover

■■■ Wargame fans who haven't tried COMBAT MISSION: BEYOND OVERLORD are missing out on what I feel is the best tactical wargame ever released. The game already has an enormous following, and mods started to trickle out within a few days of COMBAT MISSION'S release.

Mad Dog's Mod Packs are must-downloads, with better graphics and vastly improved sounds that add a lot of atmosphere to the battles. The graphics pack has new grass tiles that make elevation changes easier to eyeball, and also adds spiffy new paint jobs for a few vehicles. The sound pack makes guns sound beefier, adds more screams and ricochet noises, and generally makes you feel like you are directing a big-budget, Hollywood flick instead of merely ordering troops around the map. You can grab both packs and several updates at **combathq.thegamers.net.**

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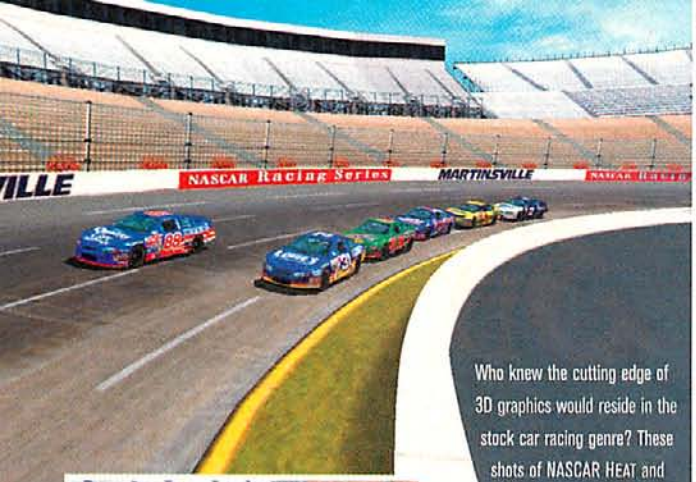
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BY TOM PRICE tom_price@ziffdavis.com

Start Your Engines

HASBRO SET TO HEAT UP THE RACING GENRE











Who knew the cutting edge of 3D graphics would reside in the stock car racing genre? These shots of NASCAR HEAT and NASCAR RACING 4 blur the lines of photorealism.

When it's released in late summer/early fall, NASCAR HEAT could very well turn out to be the HIGH HEAT 2000 of NASCAR simulations. It has the potential to refresh the PC racing-sim genre in much the same way 3DO's celebrated baseball sim did to its own. The reason: Not only does it sport some grognard-worthy, seriously-anal physics and hyper-realistic graphics, it features one of the best single-player career-modes since GRAN TURISMO.

Yes, of course NASCAR HEAT will let you play through a fully-licensed NASCAR season, with every track, Daytona included. And yes, you'll be able to compete against your favorite drivers in time trials. But what's really different about NASCAR HEAT is their "Beat The Heat" mode—a mission-based game style that challenges you to progress through a series of driving scenarios emphasizing different skills. In one challenge, you might have to use drafting to move up a specified number of places; in another, a huge wreck develops directly in front of you, and you must find a path through the smoke and spinning cars back into the race. Completing challenges opens up more missions and some special prizes at the end.

If you're worried that all that fun is going to impinge upon the hardcore simulation aspects of the game, forget it. Publisher Hasbro is working with developer Monster Games—a company started by ex-Papyrus folks—who developed the well-liked VIPER RACING for Sierra Sports a few years back. These guys know racing sims like no one knows racing sims.

Well, maybe like no one except the Papyrus team, which is still alive and kicking, and at this moment racing to get NASCAR RACING 4 out the door before Christmas. Their demo at Sierra's E3 booth this year drew crowds of slacked-jawed race fans who came to gawk at the "I can't believe its not butter" graphics. The NASCAR RACING series has set the standard for stock car sims, and minor tunes to their already superb physics engine and near-photorealistic graphics engine just mean more excellence.

The question is, will NASCAR RACING 4 lose its spot at the top of the heap to the upstart NASCAR HEAT? If you ask us, who cares? Two really excellent NASCAR games at the same time is nothing we'll cry over. Heck, break out the Schlitz and Skoal—it's racin' time!

TOM'S MIX

1. Deus Ex
2. The Sophtware Slump by Grandaddy
3. The Forums at **fatbabies.com**
4. Napster
5. Getting to do my very first mix column!

"What Do They Call You, Wheels?"

EA Superbike 2001

■■■ Inside Racing got a recent sneak peek at an early version of the next installment in EA's venerable motorcycle racing sim, SUPERBIKE 2001, which is based on the SUPERBIKE 2000 engine, but with new animations that should dish out some spectacular crashes. The driving difficulty has been dumbed down a bit for newbies as well. Other than that, the only really significant change is the AMA league update to the 2000 season.

Turn, turn, turn

The Return of Grand Prix

■■■ Of course, NASCAR isn't everyone's cup of beer. Some racing sim fans like to make a right turn once in a while. In fact, Formula 1 racing has become one of the fastest growing sports internationally, and is making its return to the United States on September 24th in Indianapolis. Here in the States, we treat F1 like soccer: a wildly popular international sport that befuddles us.

To the rescue: another Hasbro title.

GRAND PRIX 3 from Geoff Hammond – the programming whiz who brought us F1 GRAND PRIX and GRAND PRIX 2 – will give gamers the opportunity to compete against all of the FOA-licensed teams in a simulation of the entire F1 season. Hammond's earlier games have been hailed for their physics engines, and this year's model looks to be tighter than ever. GRAND PRIX 3 is on shelves now.





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BY DESSLOCK desslock@desslock.com

Four for One

DESSLOCK WEIGHS IN ON THE BIG SUMMER RPG RELEASES

Who dares ignore the elves? For comments from the creators of DEUS EX, FALLOUT, and SYSTEM SHOCK 2 on this column's topic, as well as daily RPG news updates, check out Desslock's RPG News at desslock.gamespot.com.

Four significant RPGs have been hurled into the waiting hands of gamers during the past month. You'd have to go back to 1992-1993 and the glory days of the ULTIMA and WIZARDRY series to find more than a couple of major role-playing games released during even the same quarter. But while many of the RPGs released during the early 90s had similar gameplay and comparable medieval fantasy settings, these current RPGs are more easily differentiated.

Diablo II

As in its predecessor, DIABLO II's gameplay consists almost exclusively of slaughtering hordes of monsters to gain treasure and experience points. Since your character constantly gains more formidable abilities and weaponry, the relatively simple playstyle is just as addictive as the original DIABLO—and in other games that exploited that same formula, such as EVERQUEST. It's difficult to extract yourself from a game that keeps you on the verge of being rewarded.

In spite of its gameplay, DIABLO II just isn't as compelling as other Blizzard titles. The gameplay gets repetitive far quicker than the original did—perhaps because the monsters seem less challenging. It's still fun, and its new development system can make playing each class a completely different experience. But Blizzard has been unable to get its BattleNet servers to consistently perform, even after conducting a lengthy stress test to prepare the servers for anticipated demand. It's particularly frustrating, since some of the game's cooler features are only available online. Any other company would have been lauded for creating DIABLO II, but because of Blizzard's reputation, the game is mildly disappointing.

Icewind Dale

When ICEWIND DALE was initially announced at last year's ECTS, I was concerned that Interplay was over-playing the BALDUR'S GATE engine and *D&D* license to quickly produce a game without having a strong design vision. But the producers of FALLOUT and PLANESCAPE: TORMENT have ended up with another solid RPG. It doesn't have the storyline depth of PLANESCAPE: TORMENT, but in a number of ways it's a "meatier" RPG than BALDUR'S GATE, although smaller in scope. The music is outstanding, the monsters bigger and more detailed than those in BALDUR'S GATE, and there's a high experience-point cap, allowing you a more satisfying stand-alone *D&D* experience.

Deus Ex

DEUS EX offers a hybrid gameplay style that, at first glance, resembles a sophisticated first-person shooter burdened with mediocre AI—in spite of the solid RPG pedigree of its development team. But DEUS EX provides completely original non-linear gameplay, a character development system with skills and traits that are almost all useful, and a compelling big-brother conspiracy theory plot. DEUS EX merges gameplay features of SYSTEM SHOCK and THIEF with the UNREAL graphics engine—and storyline elements that seem liberally extracted from *The Matrix*, *Blade Runner*, and the *X-Files*. It's a truly unique game that provides a very personalized experience, in a visually stylistic setting.

Vampire

Lastly, and least, is VAMPIRE THE MASQUERADE—REDEMPTION, a game that doesn't live up to its promise. Opinions on VAMPIRE are mixed—it's not a clear-cut winner or loser. It does feature the best looking graphics of any of the new RPGs, and Nihilistic has done a great job of adapting White Wolf's complex milieu. But its story-driven gameplay is linear, repetitive, and non-interactive. Although VAMPIRE'S AI is a lot better than ULTIMA IX: ASCENSION's, the game ultimately ends up highlighting how difficult it is to make AI function well in 3D environments. VAMPIRE is still fresh looking, with a novel setting and intuitive interface. The story-teller feature—where players act as game-masters and generally control the gaming world for other players—represents a significant advance for the genre.

Most surprisingly, all four of these RPGs have enjoyed a level of commercial success, proving that there is a demand for a variety of RPGs....now, what will next month bring?

DESSLOCK'S MIX

1. Diablo II Hardcore mode
2. Fight Club DVD
3. Pen & paper D&D deja vu while playing Icewind Dale
4. X-Men
5. The ambition (but not the implementation) of Klingon Academy

Which RPG Is for Me?

While dedicated RPG fans won't hesitate to pick up all four games, each title is sufficiently different from the others to potentially appeal to different groups of gamers. For gamers who have to narrow their choice to just one, here's an outline of who is most likely to enjoy, or hate, each of these four games.

Game	Most likely to appeal to fans of...	Most likely to annoy gamers who...
DIABLO II	EVERQUEST and DIABLO; best for gamers who like to stomp dozens of monsters	Prefer deeper role-playing games, like FALLOUT and PLANESCAPE TORMENT
ICEWIND DALE	*D&D* and BALDUR'S GATE	Hated the BALDUR'S GATE engine or combat
DEUS EX	SYSTEM SHOCK and first-person shooters	Like exclusively medieval fantasy RPGs or who hate 3D engines
VAMPIRE	White Wolf's settings and adventure/RPG hybrids	Are looking for more interactive, non-linear environments

Drop in on some friends

When terrorists secured the compound, Alpha Team mobilized on their **favorite server.**

Agent Z **instant-messaged his teammates** with a ballsy scheme to go through the window.

Twenty minutes of breaking glass and shattering limbs ensued.

Afterward, they regrouped on the **chat channel.**

"Next time, **you** guys be the terrorists!"



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BY ROBERT COFFEY robert_coffey@ziffdavis.com

Get Out of My Interface!

GAME DESIGNERS, PLEASE DON'T REINVENT THE WHEEL

If you want to tell a story with moving images, you have a lot of options: You've got your assorted puppets, live performance, film, video, cute little flip books, and so on. But if you're charging actual cash money to see your masterwork, you better have a really good reason for showing your movie upside down and underwater, forcing your audience to don scuba equipment and bob on their heads for two hours. Actively alienating your audience doesn't put you on the fast track to success.

And yet, incredibly, that's what some games seem to be doing on the most fundamental level: their interface. While turn-based games are frequently guilty of needlessly baroque layers of tabs, buttons, and mystifying icons (think BRAVEHEART or GANGSTERS), it's RTS games that have been driving me nuts lately. I am sick to death of being forced to click on empty terrain simply to deselect units. I am tired of 3D games with loads of valleys and dramatic elevations, but no hotkey for centering on my current squad. I am tired of mopping up the gallons of bile I am compelled to spew because this one game uses the Alt key where every other game in the history of gaming has opted for Ctrl. I don't need to relearn how to ride a bike every time I hop on a new one, and I shouldn't have to relearn or reprogram rudimentary commands every time I load a new game, simply because some designer thought that building an interface every bit as likely as an Indigo Girls swimsuit calendar would set him apart from the pack.

It does set you apart: You become the game I hate to play.

So please, lord god king game designers of the world, stop it. Stop it now. Take a cue from the by-now-standardized mouse and keyboard combo of first-person shooters, and just acknowledge that some things work well. Look at the games that made RTS what it is (STARCRAFT, WARCRAFT, C&C) and *build* on those interfaces, don't overhaul them. Remove that initial hurdle and let gamers get right into the things that make your game good.

ROBERT'S MIX

1. Diablo II
2. Dark Reign 2
3. The Old 97s
4. George Lucas in Love

at **www.mediatrip.com**

5. Deus Ex

AGE 2 Value Test

THE CONQUERORS is to AGE OF EMPIRES 2 as RISE OF ROME is to AGE OF EMPIRES?

■■■ If you see this analogy problem on your gaming IQ test, know that the answer is B: Not quite. THE CONQUERORS expansion is not the massive improvement over its predecessor that RISE OF ROME was, but, of course, the original AGE was in need of a lot more work. THE CONQUERORS offers a few game-mechanic tune-ups (peasants behave a little more sensibly, farms can be queued up using the Mill, ships now sail in formation), but this expansion is really about adding a little more of everything—a few more civs, techs, special units, single-player campaigns, and multiplayer victory conditions. If you enjoyed the single-player campaigns of the original, you'll get your money's worth of war from the four campaigns, one of which features famous battles from the past 1000 years of warfare. If you're a net player, the few new victory conditions and unique units could spice up the competitive stew. *–Chris Lombardi*

CHECK OUT THE CD-ROM



TO THE COMMANDER IN CHARGE OF MY ALLEGIANCE TEAM:



I'm sure you want to win. I'm sure you have the best intentions for us – your teammates and willing minions. But could I make a small suggestion? Either buy a frickin' clue or relinquish the reins of power, because I'm sick and tired of fleets of Interceptors repeatedly killing me because you're too damned stingy or oblivious to upgrade our ships beyond Fighters with plinky-ass guns. So do us all a favor: Have a strategy, listen to your teammates, learn the game, and stop watching those damn Friends reruns while playing, or so help me God I will find a way to send an electromagnetic pulse so huge through your modem line that even your neighbor's refrigerator won't run for a week.

Thanks for your time, and Happy Gaming!

–That Guy You Just Sent to His Certain Death for the 23rd Time



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BY THIERRY "Scooter" NGUYEN thierry_nguyen@ziffdavis.com

Quoth the Raven: "Ship It!"

A BEHIND-THE-SCENES LOOK AT CRUNCH TIME AT RAVEN SOFTWARE

What's it like to work at a game company? A recent visit to Raven Software during crunch time for STAR TREK VOYAGER: ELITE FORCE revealed a game company with a work ethic as unique as their games.

Feed the Team

Some of the things I saw that day looked pretty normal. Conference rooms were set aside for the three teams (SOLDIER OF FORTUNE GOLD, VOYAGER, and an unnamed PS2 project), yet the only time I saw such a room being used was for the Pizza Lunch. Every fifteenth of a month, the staff (around 50 people) is treated to pizza. It also happened to be owner Brian Raffel's birthday, so a cake was thrown into the mix.

After munching on pizza and cake, Project Lead Brian Pelletier gave me the lowdown on the development of ELITE FORCE. "At first, I was kinda bummed that we got the *Voyager* license instead of the *Next Generation* one, but then I started to appreciate the freedom we had. We were able to make up whole new alien races and weapons, and we can just say 'it's the Delta Quadrant, this is an undiscovered species.'"

Gamers who played the demo noticed the slick scripting system that allows the player to affect scripted events, which took quite a bit of work. "The scripting system took somewhere between three weeks to a month to create, and then we kept on tweaking it for the designers," mused programmer Josh Weier. That is just one of the things they had to add to id's QUAKE III ARENA engine; another was, well, a single-player game. Adding to the challenge was the fact that id wasn't finished with Q3A while ELITE FORCE was in development. "We've always had a good relationship with id; we'd send them a bug, and they'd reply with a way to fix it. Understandably, they pretty much stopped talking to us when Q3A shipped. But by then, we had already added so much, that we focused on getting everything to work," remarked lead programmer James Monroe.

When I was there, the team was making sure the team AI worked (DAIKATANA had just been released). Employees often tested missions to make sure the team members navigated the world properly. Once satisfied with that, they'll send a release candidate to Activision, who will then start the beta-testing.

Real Design Work

This all sounds fine and normal, but then I observed the extremely casual atmosphere in quality assurance. Programmer Jake Simpson threw up a Capture-The-Flag server, and soon enough, a good chunk of the staff joined in, and it became a big Borg vs. Klingon Empire match. Afterwards, employees casually floated in and out of each other's cubicles/offices, and discussed the latest rounds of bugs and design issues. Programmer Pat Lipo asked for input on weapons balancing; several team members debated the weapons. An excerpt from the ensuing conversation:

John Scott (programmer): The Scavenger primary fire is completely useless. The Tachyon Disruptor primary is way too powerful; everyone was using that...

Pat Lipo: Yesterday, everyone said that the Tachyon secondary fire was too wimpy, so I upped the primary to make up for that. Now the primary is too powerful? Okay, let me adjust the damage values again. Now what about the Compression Rifle...

Pelletier explains that these impromptu gatherings are the heart of development right now. "We always just gather around and talk about what needs fixing and what doesn't after a session," he says. But it's not always so casual. They're entering crunch time, and that's evident by the many employees talking about coming in during the weekend to fiddle with bugs; or the fact that when we returned at 11 p.m. after seeing *X-Men*, several staffers had remained at the office the whole time to tweak the game.

In short, I went in expecting a typical, people-chained-to-their-computers-and-attending-meetings atmosphere, but instead found a dedicated team of people who knew how to have fun while working.

I'd like to thank all the people at Raven for putting up with me that day and showing me the ropes of development.

SCOOTER'S MIX

1. Transmetropolitan #35, page 11, bottom panel
2. Diablo II
3. Deus Ex
4. Death To The Pixies by The Pixies
5. Easy Riders, Raging Bulls by Peter Biskind



left to right (1) It's official: Raven employees will now have to start sacrificing sleep and weekends to hammer out any bugs or design issues in ELITE FORCE. (2) A typical discussion session. From left to right, programmers Mike Gummelt, Pat Lipo, and Keith Fuller discuss the possible addition of a "drop item" key. (3) Artist Kim Lathrop is the typical Raven employee: His cubicle doubles as a toy museum. (4) Raven's trophy case serves as a motivator for their work ethic.

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G.O.D. (Action)
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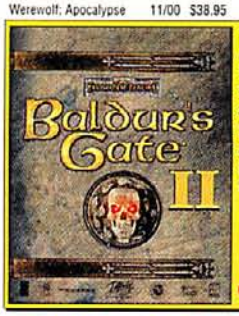


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Interplay (Roleplaying)
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To obtain a winners list, available within 15 days after winners are chosen, send a stamped, self-addressed envelope by December 8, 2000 to: COMPUTER GAMING WORLD/FALCON NORTHWEST CONTEST, 50 Beale Street, 12th Floor, San Francisco, CA 94105, attention: Annie Lipscomb. All interpretations of the rules and decisions regarding the winners by Ziff Davis Media are final. Ziff Davis Media reserves the right to change or cancel this contest at any time.

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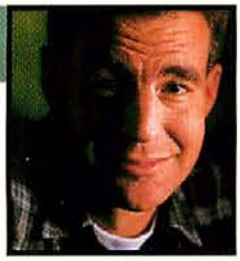
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A Moveable Geek

Jeff comes back from France and is more confused than ever

I expect you people to behave. I expect to be able to go to France for a month, come back, and not have the whole damn gaming world turned upside down. Is that really too much to ask? Apparently, it is, because I *did* just get back from a month in France, and suddenly, I have no idea what's going on any more. Four weeks of blissfully eating baguettes, drinking wine, and watching Jerry Lewis movies, all shot to hell the instant I get back, because you guys can't keep it together. What am I talking about? Let's see....

Microsoft Buys Bungie

Understand that I am one of the original MacDorks. My very first computer was a Mac Plus, which I bought back in 1986, when most of my fellow editors were either in diapers, in junior high, or both. While Mac gaming has always been fairly pathetic, there have been a few bright spots. DARK TOWER is one of my all-time favorite games, as is Bungie Software's MARATHON, which to this day has still not received the credit it deserves for being the first shooter to ever tell a compelling story (and to offer outstanding deathmatching options), years before HALF-LIFE appeared on the scene. Bungie had been the great white hope of Mac gaming—easily the equivalent of id Software in terms of talent, ambition, and cool.

> Bungie belongs to, of all people, Microsoft. Han Solo has joined the Empire.

But now that's all over. Bungie belongs to, of all people, Microsoft. Han Solo has joined the Empire. Yes, I know they're still going to bring HALO to the Mac, but that's not the point. The point is, even though I have been completely co-opted into the Microsoft Borg myself, I still don't want them to own *everything*. Even though I sold *my* soul, it was always comforting to know that those guys were out there, keeping the faith. Even when they expanded into the PC market with the MYTH games, their Mac cred remained strong.

I still think Bungie is one of the coolest companies around, and only a fool would blame them for making such an incredibly sweet deal, but, man, go back five years and this is every Mac gamer's worst nightmare. Someone hold me.

DIABLO II Battle.net Woes

What the hell? Just a couple months ago, I used this space to write a Blizzard love letter, "What Would Blizzard Do?" One month in Froggyville, I come back and now I have to write a follow-up. Let's call this one "What Blizzard Didn't Do." What they didn't do, apparently, is adequately prepare for the onslaught of gamers who'd want to play DIABLO II online, as trying to connect to the BattleNet servers—at the time of this writing—is still a frustrating and mostly futile experience.

Blizzard still has loads of credibility in my mind, and I'm sure they'll get this together, but I can't blame the many, many disgruntled fans for being pissed. I've been able to successfully start or join multiplayer games maybe 50 percent of the time, at best. If I'd had to pay for the game, I'd be feeling screwed right about now.

This is an old story, repeated many times in this business, but never before by Blizzard: You need to adequately test your product before releasing it to the public and charging money for it. No one wants to pay for something that doesn't work as advertised, and no one wants to hear your excuses—no matter how valid—for why it doesn't work. Yeah, it's a new client-server model; yeah, there are too many people trying to connect; yeah, these problems always occur with new Internet games. But shouldn't these problems have been foreseen before the game shipped? Especially after the battle.net fiasco with the first DIABLO? This is a rare misstep from a great company—and I hope they learn their lesson while taking their lumps.

The Death of PC Gaming

Gee, should I update my resume? (Wait, don't answer that.) While everything seemed relatively fine and dandy before my vacation, I came back to find everyone suddenly debating whether this industry was on its last legs. The Xbox and PlayStation 2, the migration of developers to these next-gen consoles, the dearth of great PC games, the aging PC audience—all are cited here and there as signs that we shall soon be folding up the tent and turning in our mice and keyboards. This is quite simply a load of pish.

Look, we go through this every time the next round of consoles come out, and it never means anything. The fact is, there are certain types of games that will always be better and more popular on PCs, and, right now, the PC can still do things—like Internet gaming, and upgrades, and user mods—much better than the consoles. I'm not saying we're not in a downturn—we are. But the demand is still there, the machines are still there, and these new consoles have yet to even ship or to prove themselves. Who knows? The Xbox could blow. So let's cut the nervous-Nellie act and save the panicking for when it really matters.

And in the meantime, any publishers starting an Xbox magazine, you know where to find me. CGW

Jeff hopes that the jerks who mugged him in Paris spent the money on DIABLO II and then couldn't connect. Email him at jeff_green@ziffdavis.com.

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